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DETECTIVE MAGAZINE



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BLUE,
AND DEADLY!**
by **BURT SIMS**

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Town State

DOUG CAME TO THE RESCUE AND THEN...



HE'LL NEED HELP
IN THOSE TREES! I'D
BETTER GET OVER
THERE!

BOUND FOR NEW YORK CITY AFTER A WEEK'S
FISHING TRIP, DOUG DAVIS WATCHES THE
PILOT OF A CRASHING PLANE DRIFT INTO
HEAVY TIMBER...



ARE YOU
ALL RIGHT?

YES... BUT
AM I GLAD TO
SEE YOU!

A
GIRL

HE FINDS GAIL WILSON, CO-OWNER
OF A NEW YORK AIR TAXI SERVICE
IN A BAD SPOT.



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HOSPITAL NEEDS
THIS SERUM
DESPERATELY

I KNOW THE
ROAD LIKE A
BOOK. LET'S
GO



I MUST PHONE ABOUT
THE PLANE, TOO, SO I'LL
BE ABOUT HALF
AN HOUR

I'LL WANDER
ABOUT TOWN

SHE'S A PIP!
WISH I'D SHAVED
TODAY



HELLO. WHERE'S
THE BARBER? I
WANT A QUICK
SHAVE

HE'S OUT TO LUNCH.
BUT, THERE'S A
GILLETTE RAZOR
YOU CAN USE



HERE'S
A THIN
GILLETTE
BLADE FOR
YOU
THANKS



I GO FOR
THIS BLADE
OF YOURS.
SKIMMED 'EM
OFF SLICK AS
A WHISTLE!

WHISKERS DON'T
COME TOO TOUGH
FOR THIN
GILLETTES.
THEY'RE REALLY
KEEN!



SO YOU LIVE IN
BRONXVILLE!
I'VE JUST JOINED
THE OAK HILLS
GOLF CLUB OUT
THERE

DAD IS A
MEMBER, TOO.
YOU MUST
MEET HIM

YOU'RE
HANDSOME!

ON THE LONG DRIVE BACK, GAIL AND
DOUG FIND PLENTY TO TALK ABOUT.



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Combined with
DETECTIVE FICTION MAGAZINE

Vol. 67

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Published bi monthly by Popular Publications, Inc., at 1125 E. Vaile Ave., Kokomo, Indiana. Editorial and Executive Offices, 205 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y. Henry Steeger, President. John J. McVarish, Treasurer. Entered as second class matter at the Post Office at Kokomo, Indiana. Copyright, 1952, by Popular Publications, Inc. This issue is published simultaneously in the Dominion of Canada. Copyright under International Copyright Convention and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. All rights reserved, including the right of reproduction, in whole or in part, in any form. Single copy 25c. Annual subscription for U.S.A., its possessions and Canada, \$1.50. other countries, 50c additional. All correspondence relating to this publication should be addressed to 1125 E. Vaile Ave., Kokomo, Indiana, or 205 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y. When submitting manuscripts, enclose stamped, self-addressed envelope for their return, if found unavailable. The publishers will exercise care in the handling of unsolicited manuscripts, but assume no responsibility for their return. Printed in the U.S.A.

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Four for the Gallows!



By **HAROLD HELFER**

Witness after witness swore the four were the mad-dog killer-bandits. But one smudged fingerprint said otherwise—and saved four innocent men from the hangrope!

THEY will tell you at the FBI offices in Washington that all the effort and trouble to bring into being the science of fingerprinting would have been worthwhile if it had been involved in only the Case of the Car Window Smudge.

Four men entered a Lamar, Colorado, bank on May 23, 1928. They had guns in their hands, and they announced to one and all, "This is a holdup!"

There were the usual pale, alarmed faces of the luckless patrons of a place breached by armed intruders. But there was something else too. Gunplay. When the smoke had cleared, both A. Newton Parrish, president of the bank, and his son, John F. Parrish, lay mortally wounded. Unperturbed, the bank bandits went about the business of looting the bank of \$219,000.

The shooting had brought officers and citizens with guns running toward the bank. But the four murdering bandits walked boldly out into the daylight—and nobody could do anything about it.

The robber foursome had two living shields in front of them—Tellers Everett A. Kessinger and E. A. Lungren. They took the hostages into their getaway auto and sped off.

Lungren they pitched out of their auto. He survived. But Kessinger wasn't so

lucky. His bullet-ridden body was found in an abandoned shack near Liberal, Kans.

At the outskirts of Dighton, Kans., the bandits phoned for a physician—Dr. W. W. Wineinger. One of them had been wounded in the bank gunplay. When the doctor showed up, they made him attend to the wounded man at gun point.

Then they forced the doctor to drive to the edge of a cliff in his car. They shot him to death and tossed his body over the cliff. Then they sent the doctor's car over the cliff after him.

One of the great manhunts in the history of the Middle West was now underway for the killers. There was a catch though: The officers had no idea who the men were. They hadn't been able to run into any sort of definite clue that would point up the identity of any of the vicious foursome.

The officers gave the smashed car of the murdered doctor a thorough going over. But they hadn't been able to come across anything that seemed to provide any link to the "mad-dog murderers." They were about to give up when one of the officers pointed to something and said, "Look."

It didn't seem like very much. It was just a smudge on a window of the car. But the officers had nothing else.

(Continued on page 3)

WHAT SECRET POWER DID THIS MAN POSSESS?



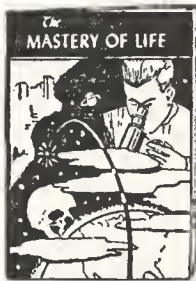
Benjamin Franklin
(A Rosicrucian)

WHY was this man great? How does anyone—man or woman—achieve greatness? Is it not by mastery of the powers within ourselves?

Know the mysterious world within you! Attune yourself to the wisdom of the ages! Grasp the inner power of your mind! Learn the secrets of a full and peaceful life! Benjamin Franklin—like many other learned and great men and women—was a Rosicrucian. The Rosicrucians (NOT a religious organization) first came to America in 1694. Today, headquarters of the Rosicrucians send over seven million pieces of mail annually to all parts of the world.

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(Continued from page 6)

It was touch and go whether they'd be able to get a readable result from what seemed like it might be a fingerprint. But with powder—and perseverance—they finally managed to bring out the print of a man's right index finger.

Of course, there was nothing to indicate that it belonged to the bandits. The officers ascertained that it wasn't the slain doctor's print, or anyone close to him, but then, of course, the doctor got around quite a bit and there was no telling who might have left the smudge. . . .

MEANWHILE, things began to "break" for the investigators of the sanguinary bank caper. In Texas, one William Jennings Bryan Walker had been arrested on suspicion he might be one of the bank robbers. Walker's fingerprint didn't match the "car smudge" but he was identified by witnesses as one of the four bandits. In fairly short order, Charles C. Clinton was picked up in Kansas City, Alfred Oliver in St. Louis, Floyd Jarrett in Oklahoma. In each and every case, none of the suspect's fingerprints matched the "smudge", but they were all identified by witnesses to the robbery murders.

The men protested their innocence, but public feeling was running high. "Lynch talk" was in the air. They'd been identified, said some; why go through all the rignarole of a judge and jury? Had they given any of their four victims a chance?

Lynching or no, though—positively identified as they had been—the four men appeared doomed.

And they undoubtedly would have wound up at the end of a rope—except for a man who was some two thousand miles away and who had no direct connection with the case. His name was Albert Ground. He was a fingerprint technician with the FBI in Washington. He'd become fascinated by a print that had come his way as a matter of routine recently.

It was the print made from the smudge of the dead doctor's car window and what interested him so much about it was the markedly peculiar way the ridges curved and looped. He had it blown up many times its size and he kept it on the desk near him. Whenever he had a spare moment he'd just stare at the unusual print.

One day, in the course of events, a fingerprint came his way. Scores upon scores did all the time, but this one caused him to jump out of his chair and exclaim: "This is it! It matches the odd-looking print I've been keeping."

He hadn't even looked at the print by his desk when he said this, but he'd memorized the print so well it turned out he was right. The new print had been submitted by Stockton, Calif., officials in the ordinary course of events. It belonged to suspect arrested in connection with a local robbery, a man who gave his name as William Harrison Holden.

Well, the officers concerned with the Lamar bank holdup, though they considered their case solved with the identification of the four men now in jail, talked to Holden. It turned out that he was really Ralph Flagle, who once had lived around Lamar and had by no means the best of reputations. And pretty soon he broke down and confessed to participating in the holdup, implicating Howard L. Royston and George J. Abshier, who also confessed, as well as his brother, Jake Flagle. Ralph Flagle, Royston and Abshier were hung for their crimes. Jake Flagle was killed in a gun duel with officers at Bronson, Mo.

And that's how it came about that a smudge on a car window saved four innocent men from the gallows and brought to justice the four real criminals.

The case even caused the usually reticent J. Edgar Hoover to comment: "It just goes to show how unreliable the testimony of eye witnesses can be, how valuable a tiny piece of evidence can be—and how wonderful fingerprints are." ♦ ♦ ♦



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Gil Vine's investigation ranges over the length and breadth of Manhattan, with side trips to Lexington, Kentucky and Long Island, to gather evidence, and to round up suspects.

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READY for the RACKETS

A Department

Dear Detective Fans,

It was the great Russian novelist Tolstoy who said that "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." The same goes for the business of swindling. Honest men are all alike, but every crook is dishonest in his own peculiar—and often diabolically clever—way. And that, friends, is what makes it so hard to keep off the sucker list. You may be wise to the song-shark and the swindling door-to-door salesman, but then along comes somebody with a wonderful-sounding deal—and brother, you've had it!

There's only one answer—learn to recognize every racket that has already been worked and—even more important—learn to know the basic principles of swindling that are always there no matter what form the particular con game takes. For example, if it's "something for nothing"—watch out! Likewise, beware of the pitiful tug at the heartstrings. And above all, if you're doing business with a stranger you don't know you can trust, don't let him get ahold of your money before he delivers.

Here are some true experiences of people who learned these things the hard way. If you find yourself in the same boat, why not help to warn others by writing in your own misadventure? We'll pay \$5 for each letter we print, withholding your name if you request. Send all letters to The Rackets Editor c/o DIME DETECTIVE, 205 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y. If you wish your letter returned if we cannot use it, please include a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

Now on to the rackets!

Shocking Stockings

Dear Sir:

A friend of mine owns a variety store here in town. One day a salesman came in and showed her a fine grade of nylon stockings at a price that was more than reasonable. He told her that it was a sell-out lot; the new shades were coming out so he was selling his old lots cheaper. He had only five dozen left, and he named a price lower than any she had paid for nylons before.

He was in a hurry, and it wasn't until after he had left that she noticed he had not given her a bill of sale. On examining the stockings, which were very neatly packaged and labeled, she found that they had runners, were different shades and were definitely unsalable. It will be a very long time before she snaps up any so-called bargains from unknown salesmen.

J. K.
Kenosha, Wisc.

Wrong Number

Dear Sir:

I answered my doorbell one morning to find a smooth-looking young man, neatly dressed in the sport clothes of the salesman, standing at the door with a house-number street sign in his hand.

I had recently moved into my new home, and I was interested in the design of the sign he showed me. In fact, it was just what I wanted. I gave him my order, and he wrote me a receipt: my name and address with the name, number and telephone number of the shop where the signs were being made.

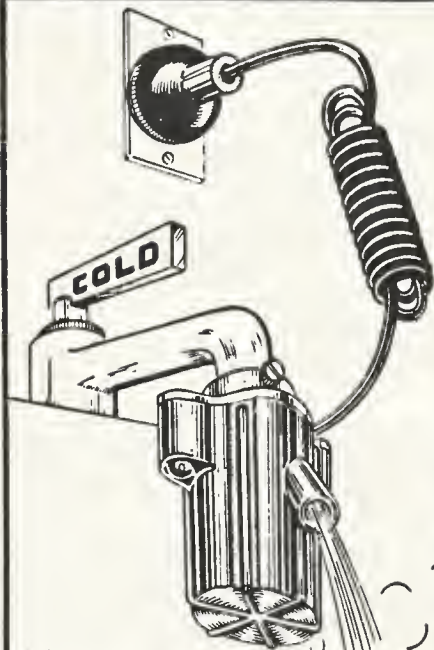
He asked me where I wanted the sign placed, and we picked out a suitable place. As he started to walk away, as though it was an afterthought, he asked me if I would like to pay him for the sign, and then he would not disturb me on the afternoon he put the sign up. Being quite gullible, and sleepy-headed too in the afternoon, I thought that was a great idea and gave him the money.

The days turned into a week, and I made excuses to myself why the young man hadn't delivered my sign. I finally convinced myself that something was amiss. I called the telephone number he had given me, only to find there was no such number; I went to the address given me only to find it did not exist.

Since I was so unwise and had no one to blame except myself, I hesitated to report the swindle. After thinking it over, I came to the conclusion that I ought to report it to protect others who

(Continued on page 114)

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- ☐ Send JET INSTANT HOT WATER HEATER. I enclose \$5.00.
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NAME
 ADDRESS
 CITY ZONE STATE

10 DAY MONEY BACK GUARANTEE!

BEAUTIFUL, BLUE,

THE day the girl with the blue eyes, and convertible to match, wheeled into Reliable Motors, I should have smiled pleasantly, waved—and taken to the high ground as though the dam had busted.

Instead, I lifted my hundred and sixty pounds off the office porch, sauntered down the steps and put my arms on top of the car door.

For a moment I thought maybe she had the bus wired for burglars. The tingle went up and down my spine, and the blood was never redder in my veins. But it was all from the closeup view I was getting of her.



With or without the luscious lady at the wheel, the convertible looked like a bargain. And Johnny found it was, too—for a guy in the market for his own private hearse!

AND DEADLY!

Thrill-Packed Detective Novelette

By
BURT SIMS



Ace said sharply, "I told you to sit down."

Some of the boys along that section of Vine Street would have called her wolf bait. And for good reason. She'd have made a wooden Indian flip his feather and howl.

"I'm looking for the buyer," she said in a slightly husky voice.

"You've found him," I said. "And I'll take it."

Those blue eyes widened a little. The voltage went up. "Just like that?"

I grinned. "Whatever you're selling, I'm buying."

She stiffened a little. Her tone was cool. "Do you usually make up your mind that fast?"

"Just a big impulsive kid," I said. "Do you want to sell this heap?"

She ran a slender, nervous hand over her coal-black hair, as though to be sure every glistening strand was in place. It was well-brushed hair that framed her oval face and fell in a gentle wave to the shoulders of her tailored gray suit. She wasn't checking her appearance for me, that was for sure. It just seemed natural for this girl to want to look her best, no matter how small the audience.

"Your sign says highest prices paid for used cars."

"Sure. Every dealer in Hollywood has a sign like that. Buy 'em high, sell 'em low. It can be done, too—if a guy likes a steady diet of horsemeat."

I stepped back and studied the car. It, frankly, was a beauty. The finish was perfect; a light, glossy blue. Top was in perfect condition, which says a lot for a convertible. Tires were white sidewalls, and A-1. I walked around it, glanced inside. Mileage was low, floor mat showed little use, seat covers looked like they'd just come from the shop. No dents, no welds; doors slammed solidly, arm rests showed no wear. . . .

She sat in silence. As I came back to the door I thought her shoulders were a little tense. Most people selling a car are nervous, but I had the feeling that the tension

went deeper with her. But, then, everybody has troubles.

"It hasn't been hit," I said. "How much do you want for it?"

She hesitated. "Well, I—what would you offer?"

Some people ask, and they're just being cagey. With her, she didn't know from third base how much the car was actually worth. I adopted the dubious expression, standard equipment for all used-car dealers. "Well, it's late in the season for convertibles. And nobody knows what the market's going to do. It might take me quite awhile to move it."

I was lying. I had a buyer ready and waiting. With cash. A dapper little old guy in elevator shoes who had wandered into the lot not an hour earlier, asking for a crate just like this. He'd said he wasn't in a hurry. He could wait for a clean one, Grade A. He'd wanted to know how high he might have to go, and I'd told him about twenty-three hundred. He hadn't batted an eyelash. Just given me his card. He had impressed me as a well-dressed businessman with but one weakness—loud bow ties. Expensive ones.

"I usually figure about two and a half to three hundred profit on a late model like this, if it doesn't need a lot of work. Move one a week, and it isn't a bad business, even with the weeks you don't move a thing and the licenses and the taxes and the rent."

"I might go nineteen hundred," I told her slowly, allowing a margin for bargaining.

Her face fell. "Oh. They sell for more than that. I thought—"

"I have to eat," I reminded her gently. "This upholstery wouldn't taste good, even with cream. Let me take it around the block, see how it sounds."

She slid over and I got in. "You don't want to go riding around with strangers," I told her. "My name's Aiken. Johnny Aiken. That's why we call it Reliable Motors."

She looked at me blankly. Maybe she was a little upset. Something seemed to be bothering her. I explained the gag. "Aiken Motors," I said. "Now, wouldn't that sound great?"

IT GOT me a smile, but a brief one. It was a tentative thing, as though she hadn't smiled for quite awhile. There was a trace of pain in it, too, as though anything happy or light reminded her of other things, other times. Suddenly I wanted to pat her shoulder, tell her everything was going to be all right.

"The car runs well, don't you think?"

"Sure," I said. "What's that perfume?"

"Cocktail Hour. . . . It doesn't use much gas, really, for an eight cylinder. But—there's one thing. This glove compartment. There's a little trick to it." She pushed the button, then reached beneath the instrument panel and gave it a little slap. The door fell open.

"Gosh," I said in mock dismay. "That's terrible."

She turned quickly, then saw my expression, and I got the brief smile again. "You're joking."

"Yes," I admitted. "If you didn't have so much on your mind you'd have seen it before now."

The smile faded, and the shadow came back into her eyes, and that warm little moment was gone. . . . I stopped at a traffic light. There was a guy sitting on the bus bench. It was the dapper little guy who wanted to buy a car. But before I could catch his eye, the bus slid between us and stopped.

"If it isn't too personal," I said, "why do you want to sell the car?"

She hesitated. I didn't help her. In a moment she said in a low tone, "It's—it's personal." She touched my arm quickly. "There's nothing really wrong with it. It's had the best of care."

"Sure." The bus pulled out, but the dapper little guy wasn't on it. He was still sit-

ting on the bench. I drove on, trying to figure that one out.

Two miles later I had discovered that the car ran like a Swiss watch, but it wasn't helping me make much time with the girl. She still was nervous and preoccupied when we drove back into the lot. But I thought I had the dapper little man figured out.

"Nineteen fifty," I told her, getting out. "And tell your friend that's as high as I can go."

She drew a sharp breath. "My friend?"

"Bow-tie Joe," I said, a little miffed. "It's an old game. But I can't say I've ever played it with a prettier playmate."

Her eyes didn't meet mine. "I—I don't know what you mean."

"Someone wants to sell a car. They have someone else come in earlier looking for that kind of car," I explained patiently. "They get a dealer to thinking he can move the thing without turning a hand. Sometimes the dealer falls for it and gives them a fatter price than usual, for the sake of a quick turnover. Make sense?"

A flush crept into her face. "It wasn't like that, exactly. Neither Artie nor I knew how much it was worth, really. He suggested we do it this way in order to find out."

"Smart kid, Artie. Bless his pointed little head. . . . A good friend of yours, no doubt?"

"A real friend," she said, some strength coming into her voice. "Artie stood by me when—when . . ." She let it trail off.

I let it go, with the odd feeling she was near to tears. I said uncomfortably, "You want the nineteen fifty?"

She nodded. We went in and filled out the papers. I looked at the registration slip. "Marcia Reed," I read aloud. I glanced at her gloved hands. "Miss or Mrs.?"

Her head came up. "Mrs." Then her eyes misted suddenly. She signed the papers swiftly, picked up my check and hurried out, just like that. To meet, I supposed, the dapper old guy named Artie.

It was ten minutes before I discovered I had put the carbon paper in backwards. She'd have to sign all over again. I decided to give her time to get home; maybe I'd wait until late afternoon before I went to see her.

I PUT on my hat and walked across the lot to the garage. Bill Steinbeck, my mechanic, was doing a valve grind on a crate that wouldn't clock twenty miles an hour with a tail wind when I bought it. When Bill got through, I knew, the thing would run like a grayhound loose on a rabbit farm.

He's a tall, lanky guy whom I'd inherited along with Reliable Motors and a number of delinquent accounts. Until a year ago, my dad and I had run the lot. Now I was running it alone, and I knew I'd never know as much about people as Dad did—but I was learning fast.

"Got another one, Bill. That blue job out there. Doesn't need a thing but grease. Put it up on the rack as soon as you can, will you? I'm going to lunch."

He grunted from somewhere inside the motor. I went back to the convertible and opened the trunk. Nothing there but the spare and the tools. There was a nice hydraulic jack, the kind I'd been threatening to buy for my own car. I lifted it out, threw my old one in, and figured I was about fifteen bucks ahead, right there. I went down the block to a restaurant.

I was dawdling with the second cup of coffee when the counterman called me to the phone. Bill Steinbeck said, "Going to stay there all day?"

"We've got a customer?"

"Nope. Found something."

He spends words like his own money, but he's a helluva mechanic.

"Found what?" I asked testily. "Lucky horseshoe? Bubble gum in the transmission?"

"Come on," he said, and hung up.

When I got there he had the convertible

up on the rack. He just jerked his head at me, and I stooped and went underneath with him.

His grease-stained thumb jabbed upward. I bumped my head on the drive-shaft. "What the hell is it?"

He pushed his trouble light up close. Then I saw the stains on the underside of the floorboards. Lots of them. As though something had dripped for a long time—long enough to soak through or run over the seat, and find its way along the edge of the floormat to the boards.

He said, just a trifle importantly, "Figure it's blood."

"You figure it's blood. Damned if I don't think you're glad."

"Things been pretty quiet lately."

"I didn't realize you were bored," I said apologetically, "or I'd have tossed a match in your cleaning rags."

"Gonna call the cops?"

I remembered Marcia Reed's brooding nervousness. She had her troubles; I hated to add to them. "Maybe somebody was in an accident."

"Car ain't been lit. You know that."

"Yeah. Bill, there's probably nothing to it . . ."

"Gonna call the cops?"

I swallowed. So even if she was beautiful—how did I know Marcia Reed hadn't cut somebody's throat?

I walked like I was wearing diving shoes. I didn't need anyone to remind me I had nineteen hundred and fifty clackers tied up in that car. If the cops impounded it for investigation, they impounded my dearly beloved long green. I wasn't a big operator. I couldn't stand to freeze my assets. Until I sold that crate I was so close to the horsemeat diet I could hear hoofbeats.

When I called the Hollywood station the desk sergeant switched me to someone else.

"Detective Bureau," a lazy voice said. "Sergeant Dennis."

"My name's Aiken. I run a used car lot. I bought a car this morning, and now my

mechanic has found a lot of what looks like bloodstains in it."

"Sounds interesting," Dennis agreed. "What's the address?"

I told him. He said he'd be over in a few minutes. I sat and stared at the floor, and smoked half a pack of cigarettes. After awhile I stopped wondering what there was about Marcia Reed that made me want to help her, no matter what the trouble turned out to be. Even if she was married, all I knew was that I'd like to be around to give her a hand if she needed it.

CHAPTER TWO

Tale Told in Bloodstains

JUST about the time I had decided Dennis had fallen into an open crap game somewhere, the guy showed up. He was a stocky character, built somewhat along the lines of a fire hydrant, but he walked lightly. He gave the impression that he could move fast, if he had to, but usually found it extremely distasteful. His gaze was level and pleasant.

"Maybe it's nothing," I said, as we walked to the garage. "Maybe it's something."

"Maybe," he said. We turned into the garage. His eyes went up to the convertible, paused at the license plate, and came back to me.

He smiled. "You haven't got anything to worry about. Go ahead and sell it."

"But the bloodstains—if they are bloodstains . . ."

"They are," he said, reaching for a cigarette. "Who sold this to you?"

"A woman named Marcia Reed. A mighty handsome bit of flesh she is, too."

"Yeah. Showgirl." He watched the traffic streaming down Vine in the afternoon sunlight. "Didn't you ever hear of Harry Reed?"

An alarm went off in my head. I stared at Dennis. "Well, I'll be. . . . This was

Harry Reed's car? The one he was killed in?"

Dennis blew a thin shaft of smoke. "You win the china dishes. Two weeks ago, he got it. We just turned the car loose."

I remembered it now. For a few days, it was the best newspaper story in town. Harry Reed had been one of the biggest gamblers on the Coast. Everyone knew he dealt in the more refined kinds of law-breaking, like bookmaking, floating poker games, baseball and football pools and an occasional roulette wheel—but proving it was something else.

He was handsome and affable—as much as you could see, anyway. He whirled around in the higher circles of Hollywood's celebrity colony, making fast money, and spending it the same way.

Late one afternoon a group of picnickers had found his car parked on a bluff overlooking a stretch of Malibu Beach, but handsome Harry wasn't admiring the view. Someone had knocked him quite definitely at long range with five shots from a .30 caliber carbine, the old Army game.

It seems the people who found Harry Reed had been climbing the bluff on their way home. They heard the shots and reached him within a few minutes. No one else was in sight.

A quarter of a mile away, on a rise overlooking the scene, the cops found the empty cartridges. Ambush, short and simple. Silhouetted against the sunset, Reed had been a sitting duck.

The echo was loud for a few days, with theories thicker than flies at a barbecue. The cops started with Ace Fadden, who was as big as Reed—if not bigger—in the Hollywood shadows. Fadden had his alibi, as did everyone else. None of the suspects stayed in jail long enough to muss the blankets.

"The girl," I said. "They hadn't been married long."

"That all depends," Dennis observed dryly. "Four days. With him, it was a life-

time—and probably the only legitimate thing the guy ever did. . . . They didn't even have a honeymoon." He dropped his cigarette in the dust. "Well, we're through with the car. I guess she needed the money. Harry didn't leave much."

I walked to his car with him. "That's funny. A big wheeler like that. I would think he was loaded."

"If he had money, nobody can find it. But he was loaded, all right." Dennis wore a thoughtful frown. "He was carrying a .45 automatic with a full magazine. Reed didn't carry a gun as a rule. He must have been expecting trouble."

"He got it," I said. "Say, about the girl—"

Dennis grinned. "If you can't get her out of your mind, you have a lot of company."

"Yeah. Who's this Artie character she shags around with?"

Dennis made a face. "He's supposed to be a talent agent. I think he got her a couple of jobs, before she was married. I heard he introduced her to Reed. I'd like to know more about him myself." He shook his head. "That's an odd setup. The guy—I don't know. I haven't been able to figure him out."

HE DROVE off and I went back to the garage. Bill had backed out the convertible. "I'm going to take some papers out to her," I told him. "Button the joint up for me, will you?"

He nodded.

"Disappointed?" I asked. "Smile, Willie, you ghoul. A guy was killed in it."

I turned as a man came into the lot. He was a burly guy with an expensive hat and a light brown suit that was tight across the shoulders. He glanced at the half-dozen cars in front, then came toward us.

"Well," he said heartily, "that's more like it." He gestured toward the convertible. "Not a bad-looking job."

"You looking for a car?"

He nodded, studying it. "If the price is right."

"Maybe we could make it right. This one runs like it just came out of the factory."

He took the usual slow stroll around it, checked the usual things. I watched him. It wasn't anything new for me. I had watched him for ten minutes before Detective Sergeant Dennis arrived. This boy in the brown suit had walked up and down the other side of Vine Street, studying my layout as though he were mapping it. If he were a potential customer, he certainly believed in thinking things over.

"Get in," I suggested. "We'll take it around the block."

He ran a wide hand across his face. From the looks of it, his wasn't the only hand that had been there. His nose was a little crooked, and there was some scar tissue over his eyes. Well, even prizefighters buy cars. So long as it wasn't counterfeit money, I was ready to bargain.

As he slid onto the seat I pointed out the extras. "Twin spots, radio, underseat heater, defroster—everything but a portable bar."

"Maybe I could put one in here," he said with a lopsided grin, thumbing at the glove compartment. He pushed the button.

"There's a little trick . . ." I began. I stopped abruptly as his other hand came up beneath the dash and tapped. The door came open.

Bill Steinbeck called from the garage, "Johnny. Come look at this."

I pushed my head out the window. "Now what? You find a skull somewhere?"

He waved a chunk of metal at me. The man in the brown suit was peering into the glove compartment, running his hand beneath it. "I'll be right back," I said. He didn't answer.

As I walked into the garage Bill said loudly, "This fly-wheel. You want it welded?"

"Of all the silly questions," I began. "Of

course I do. What's biting you, Bill?"

His voice dropped to a hoarse whisper. "He's got a gun."

I paused. Bill said, "Shoulder holster. Saw it when he looked at the tires."

"Maybe he's another cop."

Bill's face was scornful. "You think so?"

I don't know why, but I didn't think so. Bill's eyes widened as he looked past me. I turned, and the big man had the cushions out on the ground, the hood up and the trunk open. I went out.

"You got a right to look her over," I said, "but did you have to drop those cushions in the dirt?"

He was rummaging in the trunk. All he gave me was a grunt. My blood pressure went up a notch. "Look here, friend. I'll show you anything you want to see. But let me do the showing."

He stared coolly. "Afraid I'll find something wrong?"

I didn't want to chase off any buyers, but I had the growing feeling this guy wasn't in the market. "Hell, no." I thought about the bloodstains, and stared right back. "There's nothing wrong a little cleaning job wouldn't fix. You ought to know that."

He straightened slowly. "Why should I know that, Buster?"

"Just what're you looking for?"

"Who says I'm looking for something, Buster? Why? Did you find something?"

This wasn't the way I wanted the script to run, but he wasn't feeding me the right lines. Still and all, I didn't like his attitude, and I guessed I could mention that. I mentioned it. I still don't know what he hit me with.

When I could sit up, Bill's anxious face was so close to mine I could have worn his nose. He said laconically, "Never rile a fella's carryin' a gun."

"You're a little late with that," I pointed out, gingerly rubbing my jaw. I got up and dusted off. "Where'd he go?"

Bill eyed me. "You want to talk to him?"

"Hell, no! Can't I be curious?"

His mouth turned up slightly. It's as close as he ever comes to a smile. He hefted the wrench in his big hand. "He left, when I came out with this. Left fast."

IT WAS getting to be quite a day. I went into the office, and for lack of anything else poured a stiff jolt from the water cooler. By then I had some of my senses.

The sooner I could sell this car, the better off I'd be. It collected trouble like a sweater girl collects whistles. But—those papers had to be in order. There was no point in going all the way out to Beverly Hills until I knew she was home. I checked the phone book. No listing. Information told me no dice; it was a private number.

I remembered the card that Artie had given me. Artie Phister, it told me, had an office on Las Palmas, off Hollywood Boulevard. I called him.

A secretary answered. Phister wasn't in, she told me, but was expected any moment. I got in my coupe and drove over.

As I parked at the curb another car pulled in a few feet down the street. I paid it only casual note. After all, people can't just drive all day; they have to stop sometime. And it was a busy section of Hollywood. I couldn't tell anything about the driver except that he was an avid newspaper reader. He had the sheet up in front of his face almost before he stopped rolling. It was all so damned silly, I thought. If he was following me, what good would it do? I didn't know anything about anything. I went up to Artie's office.

When I opened the door a redhead behind a reception desk looked up from filing her nails. She wasn't a Marcia Reed, but she'd do while I was waiting. I had to admit that Artie certainly had a talent for picking talent.

"I called a few minutes ago," I explained.

"Oh, yes." Her hazel eyes narrowed a little as she sized me up.

"No bills, no warrants," I smiled. "I

would just like to talk to your boss."

Her expression was self-conscious, but no one ever had this babe off balance for long. She dropped the file in the drawer. "He's on the telephone, but if you'll take a seat I'm sure he'll see you soon."

I sat on the red-leather divan. Behind it, a sharp-angled lamp that was modern art threw indirect light. There was a door in the opposite wall.

"Business good?"

She shrugged. "Not bad, not good. Are you looking for some talent?"

I just smiled at her appreciatively. She let it bounce off like a marble hitting cement. In a moment I said, "I'm really looking for Marcia Reed. I thought she might be with him. Do you know her?"

The redhead gave me an odd glance. "Yes. Are you a jewelry salesman?"

"Nope. Should I be?"

"Never mind. He has one coming up this afternoon."

"He's buying jewelry for Marcia Reed?"

The redhead was pouting now. "Could be. What did you want with her?"

"I haven't the time to go into that interesting phase of life, sweetheart. Phister is her agent, isn't he?"

She shrugged again. "He represents her."

"And buys jewelry for her." I smiled at that. A guy as old as Artie. . . .

"He placed her in some bits a few months ago," she said. "B movies. She hasn't done any acting since she married."

"If she wants to eat, she may be at it again," I said. "Is she a good actress?"

"So far as I'm concerned," the redhead said curtly, "there are better ones out of work."

I spread my hands. "Look, I'm a new man around here. If the girl can't act, why does Phister represent her?"

The redhead gave a ladylike snort. "You aren't that new a man."

My eyebrows went up. "You mean he's trying to get jobs for her because there's a

big romance there? Artie and Marcia Reed?" I laughed. "Why, he must be thirty years older than she is. You don't really mean they're gone on each other."

Her lips tightened angrily. "You're half right. He thinks he's going to marry her, some day. He doesn't see how ridiculous he looks. He thinks he'll make her fall in love with him. But I could tell him right now—so far as she's concerned, he's just a nice old fatherly-type to have as a friend."

I shook my head incredulously. "The guy is nuts."

She stood up and reached for her purse on the filing cabinet. She knew she had talked too much, but the steam had been piling up—she'd had to let it go.

I grinned and said softly, "Is she cutting you out, baby?"

For a minute I thought she'd bang me with the purse. Then her chin climbed to a forty-five degree angle and she stalked out.

CHAPTER THREE

Legacy of Trouble

I WAS nearly through my cigarette when the other door opened and Artie Phister, as dapper as a Man of Distinction, followed his bow-tie through it. He stopped short, and his patrician brow furrowed as though he were trying to place me.

"Johnny Aiken. Reliable Motors."

"Oh. Oh, yes, Mr. Aiken." His smile was brief and as empty as a liar's promise. "Well, uh—I'm afraid I've changed my mind, Mr. Aiken. I've decided I don't really need a car, yet."

"I know you and Marcia Reed were together on that deal," I said calmly. "Save the act—or try to book it somewhere else. It happens all the time."

He teetered forward and back on his elevator shoes, one hand massaging his knuckles. "No hard feelings?"

"Not exactly. I'm looking for Mrs.

Reed. She has to sign some papers. I thought she might be here."

"You missed her by a few minutes." He took the carnation out of his buttonhole and replaced it with a fresh one from the receptionist's desk. "I put her in a cab not fifteen minutes ago."

"She going home? I'll catch her there."

He nodded absently. I had served my purpose, in Artie's plans, and his attitude told me I could go anytime. Well, I believed she had gone home, although there weren't many other things he could tell me that I would believe as quickly.

He kept his gaze on me most of the time, but it seemed to focus on my chin rather than meet my eyes. I appraised the old guy in the light of what his receptionist had told me, adding it to what Dennis had said.

I just couldn't see it. His hair was thin on top, and gray at the sides, where he let it grow the limit. His narrow face seemed to have been squeezed from both sides, and he had a blade-like nose to match. The guy was in his middle fifties, for sure, and my mind just couldn't add him up with Marcia Reed and come out love in bloom.

"She's quite a doll," I said, just testing.

He raised an austere eyebrow. "Doll?" He sniffed, as though my presence polluted the air. "Marcia Reed, young man, is one of the loveliest women who has ever walked the face of the earth. Charm, grace, beauty—why, one day she'll be the reigning queen of Hollywood." His voice had acquired a strange, faraway note. "You'll be awed that you ever met her, talked to her." His cold eyes stared at my chin. "And I'll thank you not to refer to her again in any but the most respectful of tones."

It shook me a little. Something chill had edged into the room. If Artie Phister was ever sincere about anything, this was it. His thin lips got thinner. "If you have no further business here, Mr. Aiken, I won't detain you."

Well, come to think of it, I had never heard of an age limit on love. I shrugged.

"Just leaving, Artie. You know, I don't blame you for getting a little lyrical about Marcia Reed." I opened the door. "Like you say, she's really quite a doll."

WHEN I got downstairs the street lights were coming on and the breeze whispering in from the Pacific had tiny teeth in it. The car which had parked a few feet behind mine was gone. As I stepped on the starter a voice from the sidewalk said, "Going my way, buddy?"

It was Big Boy again; the burly character who had put out my light in the car lot. He was leaning on the window in a most friendly manner, but the broad hand inside the car was fastened firmly to a cannon whose muzzle looked as big as the mouth of an empty beer barrel.

"I can't believe you're waiting for the invitation," I said slowly, "but—get in."

He sat down, holding the cannon on his lap. "Go out Sunset. I'll tell you when to turn."

I drove in silence for a few minutes. Then I glanced at Big Boy and said: "Look. Even on radio programs they give a guy a clue or two. How about it?"

"Why, sure," he said smoothly. "What do you want to know?"

"I might as well start at the beginning. What were you looking for in Harry Reed's car?"

"Next question?"

"What the hell do I have to do with all this?"

He yawned. "Next question?"

"Where are we going?"

He nodded. "All right, you had your turn; now it's mine. What did you find in Harry Reed's car?"

"Nothing."

"What were you talking to Artie Phister about?"

"Charm, grace and beauty."

He began softly whistling some nameless tune. He was through playing. We were into Beverly Hills. I thought I had it

pegged, then, but why were we going to Marcia Reed's apartment?

That was easy. We weren't. He had me take a few turns, cruise through the high rent district and finally take off up a small canyon. It was dark in here, and the homes were far apart. I took a curve, slowly, climbing, and my headlights picked up a sedan parked on the opposite shoulder, facing me. Big Boy said, "Pull over."

I swung in close to the embankment. When he switched off the ignition and killed the lights, the night swelled up and covered us like a blob of ink. I could make out the dim shape of the other car. The crickets were singing a lonely lament, the kind they had sung before I was born, and the kind they'd sing long after I was dead.

I hadn't been really scared. It was all so crazy. I didn't see why anyone would want to give me a bad time. I had done nothing, knew nothing. But in this ominous quiet the feeling stole over me that I was hemmed in, no way out, because no one was going to believe my story. Alarm drilled through me.

"Let's go over," Big Boy suggested.

"Listen—"

"Get out," he said.

We walked across the road. There was only one man in the car; a dim paleness in the gloom. His arms rested on the wheel. Beyond the car the ground fell away sharply into a densely-wooded ravine. It was perhaps a couple of hundred feet to the bottom, and rugged all the way, with a tangle of brush and rocks and small trees. It would be a wonderful place to drop a body. It might not be discovered for weeks.

There weren't any preliminaries. The man at the wheel said, "Just talk straight, Aiken." His voice had a soft, foggy quality, as though he were thinking about three sentences ahead. "There was something in Harry Reed's car when he was killed. The cops didn't find it, or I'd have heard. But when Listic shook the car down today, the stuff was gone."

"Listic," I said. "That you, Big Boy?"
"Yeah."

"Maybe he didn't look far enough," I told the other man. "Frankly, chum, I don't know what the hell you're talking about."

"I looked," Listic said brusquely. "I took another look after you took off for Artie Phister's."

"But Bill—"

"Your mechanic?" Listic's short laugh was satanic. "He's no good without a wrench. I left him sleeping under his workbench, with his shirt in his mouth." His tone hardened. "The stuff wasn't in the car."

"That sort of narrows it down," said the man at the wheel, and his voice had become as chilled as the night air. "It doesn't help you any, Aiken, that you chased right off to see Artie Phister. Did you make a deal with him?"

"A deal?"

"Did you give it to him?"

I was losing my patience. "Give *what* to him?"

Listic cuffed me alongside the head. I said, "Cut it out." He cuffed me again, just having fun. I hit him in the face with a fast left he wasn't expecting, but before he could level on me the other guy snapped, "Hold it! That's enough of that stuff for now."

Listic grated, "For now, the man said, Buster."

I didn't say anything. When the time came, I'd just have to do the best I could. But I had to admit that it wasn't a happy prospect.

Listic said, "Listen, Ace—we going to fool around with this character all night while fifty thousand bucks is maybe skipping town?"

My stomach curled up in a tight little knot. Ace. . . . The guy at the wheel must be Ace Fadden. If there were a bigger hoodlum in Hollywood, I didn't know it. My circle of acquaintances was growing larger—and rougher.

ACE said in that soft, thoughtful voice, "Only three people could have lifted it. This guy, Artie—or Marcia."

It seemed to me he was leaving out another obvious suspect. "Or," I added, "the guy who killed Reed."

Nobody said anything for a moment. Then Listic breathed, "Yeah," as though the thought had occurred to him before.

I could have jerked out my tongue. The only certain way Ace Fadden could know the killer didn't get that mysterious, fifty-thousand-dollar prize, my belated thoughts told me, was if he had killed Reed himself.

Sure, he was putting up a big search for the stuff. But that could be a double-cross in the making. Maybe he had it tucked away and was staging a search just to make it look good. Maybe, I thought, Listic was the guy who was being crossed. That would explain the big guy's suspicion that suddenly was so strong in the air I could almost smell it.

Ace said sadly, "Neither one of you boys is thinking. Look, Harry was shot from a quarter of a mile away. Those people got to him inside of three or four minutes. You know anybody could shoot a guy, run that far, search him or his car and vanish—all in three or four minutes?"

Listic said in a moment, "Yeah." He sounded convinced. I didn't say anything. I wasn't even beginning to be convinced. So maybe Ace didn't get the stuff—but it didn't mean he hadn't killed Harry Reed and had his plans interrupted by the unexpected circumstance of the beach party people suddenly showing up.

"So we come back to you, Aiken," Ace said. "You could have found the stuff and sold it to Artie." Something in his cold manner tightened the knot in my stomach.

"Whatever it is," I said with the reasoning of desperation, "how would I know he'd buy it?"

"Why'd you go to see him?"

"I was looking for Marcia Reed."

"Uh-huh," Ace said, and I could feel the

walls closing in. "You wanted to tell her what you had found in the car. . . ."

"No! I know it sounds crazy, but when she signed the papers I had the carbon in backwards."

"You're a foolish boy," Ace Fadden said. "I believe half of that—that it sounds crazy. You'd better talk, chum. Listic, you ask him."

That was all Listic needed. He whirled me around and knocked me back against the car. My head rang with the punch, and the fender put an ache in my back that I'd never lose. He stepped in close, reaching, and I could make out the gap in his face that was a brutal grin. I brought up a knee and his breath came whistling like air out of a spiked balloon. I stepped to the side and wound up again in the fleeting hope that if I could stop him for a moment, I could get away into the darkness. I swung and his head bobbed and his hands came one-two like a sewing machine, and I went backward until I was standing on space.

It seemed as though I'd never stop falling—and when I did, I wished I hadn't. The first jolt hammered the breath out of me. Brush and rocks alternately tore and punneled. A granite fist jabbed me above the kidneys; thorns scraped my face. When the rolling stopped I must have been thirty yards below the road. Pain swarmed through me.

In a moment a flashlight beam slowly swept the side of the ravine. I stayed motionless behind a clump of brush, the sound of my hoarse breathing as loud in my ears as tearing canvas. I knew that if I so much as stirred, Listic would gladly slide down there for another crack at me.

The light snapped off. The crickets were still singing, but it seemed a note of annoyance had crept into their song at the disturbance. Except for them and my breathing, the big black night was ominously quiet. Then a car engine kicked over and hummed powerfully, and my playmates drove away.

I stayed there, the salty taste of blood on my bruised lips, feeling the numbness in my body build up to a throbbing lament of pain. Waiting for strength to get back to the road, I thought about Ace Fadden.

All I knew about him was what I had heard or had read in the papers. He didn't get the press notices Harry Reed had. He wasn't the affable, glad-hand type. Whatever he did, he did quietly. So far as I knew, he wasn't a big wheel in the gambling scene. That didn't mean, however, that he wasn't. My education on that score left a lot to be desired. Just the same, I had the feeling that Ace Fadden's rackets were a little dirtier. But then, I wondered, how did Harry Reed come into the thing?

Ace and Listic had had their go at me. It didn't take a mental giant to figure out their next stop. I could have slept soundly through almost anything they wanted to do to Artie Phister. But I remembered Marcia Reed's blue eyes with the shadow of tragedy in them, the soft curve of her lips and her slender, lovely body. . . . I got on my knees and started climbing.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Convertible's Secret

WHEN I wheeled the coupe onto Sunset I cruised until I found a gas station. A session in the washroom helped a little, but I still looked like I had gone ten rounds with a bacon slicer. This was no time to dwell on the loss of my youthful bloom. I headed the coupe on the shortest route to Marcia Reed's apartment.

It was a quiet neighborhood, the street lined with well-kept trees. The long silent rows of expensive apartments gave it an air of luxury. The trees cast heavy shadows, but the lighted numbers made it easy.

I parked, and took a deep breath. The street was nearly deserted. No big black sedan. But that was no guarantee that Ace

Fadden and friend wouldn't be arriving for the party at any moment. I clung to the hope they'd gone to Artie Phister's first. Time was a rug someone had yanked from under me.

I didn't have a gun. All I had was a tired right hand and a growing aversion to fistic combat. I opened the trunk and looked for a weapon. The jack handle felt solid in my fist. On second thought I took the jack, too; it wasn't too heavy, and it might make a helluva dent in somebody's enthusiasm.

The little card under the vestibule mail slot told me H. L. Reed occupied Apartment 102. It was only half right, now, I thought grimly.

She took several minutes answering my ring. I thought, Maybe she's asleep. Then her voice came softly over the speaking tube. "Yes?"

"This is Johnny Aiken," I said swiftly. "Reliable Motors, remember?"

"Why—what is it?"

"You're about to be in a jam. A guy named Ace Fadden is on his way here. He thinks you or Artie took something out of the car. If you'll let me in I'll explain the whole thing. But you're going to have to get out of here!"

I heard her gasp. There was a pause, and then the buzzer hummed and the door latch clicked. A small foyer funneled into a thickly carpeted corridor. I tapped discreetly on Apartment 102 with the jack handle. It opened immediately.

Marcia Reed swayed a little, her face pale, and fright plain in her eyes. She wore a light blue negligee, as though she had been ready to retire. Even without make-up, she possessed a sultry beauty that struck sparks off the iron in whatever blood I had left. She stepped back. "Come in." Her voice sounded odd, a trifle higher than normal.

I took two steps, and stopped abruptly. A man in a chair across the room took a cigarette out of his mouth and gestured toward the divan. In a soft, foggy voice he

ordered, "Come in and sit down, Aiken."

"I'm aching without sitting down," I told Ace Fadden, "and if that's a bum joke it's because I don't feel like being funny."

His slate-gray eyes flicked over the tools in my hands. I said grimly, "You'll never know when you'll have a flat tire."

There was no smile on his thin, hard face. "Stick around. We may have quite a blowout after all."

I glanced around. "The crowd has shrunk a little. Don't think I'm complaining."

"Listic? He's in the bathroom with Artie. Artie got a little sick."

Marcia Reed's long, graceful hand was at her throat, terror creeping into her face. I wanted to draw her close, try to erase the nightmare growing in her mind. "He held Artie against the wall," she said, her voice dull with shock. "Then he—he hit him in the stomach. . . ."

"Real nice kid, that Listic," I said bitterly. I'd had no affection for Artie Phister, and hadn't thought it would matter—but when it came right down to a goon like Listic working him over, a rage began to beat in me.

Ace said sharply, "I told you to sit down."

HE BROUGHT his hand out of the pocket of his neat gray coat and there was a gun in it. I put the tools carefully on the leather-topped cocktail table, no false moves, and sat on the divan opposite him.

Marcia Reed said helplessly, "There's no sense to this, Ace. I've told you all I know. Harry never told me about his business affairs. Please go. Please let Artie alone."

Fadden's voice was hard as flint. "I tried asking the nice way, Marcia. I've never really trusted that screwball since he started working for me." He narrowed his eyes at his cigarette. "The nice way didn't pay off. So we're going to find out the hard way. . . . Harry had the stuff when he was killed. I'd bet on it. He picked it up from

me not more than an hour before he was killed. It would have taken him just about that long to drive to Malibu."

Bewilderment was in her face. "Stuff, Ace?"

I put in my two cents. "Why'd he drive way out there to no place?"

His gaze swept both of us. He didn't believe we were as dumb as we were acting. I could have told her he was a helluva hard man to talk out of an idea.

He said in a monotone, "I should have demanded my money first. But Harry didn't have it. He was to sell the stuff, and pay me off. I went for it because he was a good boy for me to have around. A boy like that could do us both a lot of good." He shrugged. "I figured that was why he went for the deal. It was a little new for him—but he needed dough, and I needed him."

So it wasn't any kind of a gambling setup. Not if it was new to Harry Reed. That guy had teethed on a roulette wheel. Stolen goods? Counterfeit money? I hunted for an answer.

Ace Fadden ground out his cigarette. "Fifty grand." His eyes were bleak. "I was to get it on Friday. And Harry got killed on Wednesday."

"Ace, I swear . . . I don't have it." Marcia Reed's voice was shaking. "Harry was a gambler. I knew that. So many people gamble. If they hadn't gambled with him, it would have been with someone else. It didn't make any difference to me. But—anything else . . ." Her voice broke.

"You're blind," I told him heatedly. "Anybody could see the girl doesn't know anything about it."

His voice was pitiless. "She's an actress. Maybe she knows—and maybe she doesn't. It's you, her or Artie."

"Or you!" I flared.

All expression went out of his face. I could hardly see his lips move. "Start that again," his voice cut lethally, "and I'll kill you."

The door behind him opened and Artie Phister stumbled into the room and sprawled on the floor. Listic, following, grabbed the back of Artie's coat and hauled him to a chair. Artie's eyes were glazed. His coat and shirt were sopping wet, his graying hair a matted mop. All the color had gone from his face. But oddly enough, his bow-tie was as straight as the moment he had put it on.

In that moment it struck me that he must wear the kind that clips to the collar. Somehow, that lessened Artie's stature even more for me.

Listic straightened, and stared at me. "Well, look who's joined up."

"And delighted to be here," I said dryly. "What happened the one time you fought a guy your own weight?"

Artie was mumbling now. Listic scowled at me, then bent over and slapped him lightly to bring him out of it.

Ace leaned forward. "Artie!" His voice was a whip. "Artie! You hear me?"

He nodded slowly, and his eyes came up, ignoring all of us—except Marcia Reed. They beseeched her, implored her to understand he could do nothing about this brutal humiliation. His voice was a croak. "Marcia. . . . I didn't want to bring them here. . . ."

She sobbed, and turned away, her hands over her face. I said, "Go into another room."

"She'll stay here," Ace snapped. "By the time we're through, one of you is going to talk!"

I GLANCED down at the jack and the handle. Harry Reed's jack and handle, and I was sure he would have liked for me to use them right now. But I had about as much chance of doing that as I had of climbing Pike's Peak on a pogo stick. I looked at them again, trying to seize the wisp of thought that floated temptingly just out of reach.

"You and Marcia picked up the car from

the cops," Ace growled at Artie. "You had two days to shake it down. You found the stuff then—or you got it from Aiken." His voice thinned. "You knew Harry had it."

"You're guessing again," I said. "How could Artie know—"

"Shut up!" He crossed swiftly to Artie and leaned over as the little man cowered. "Talk, you five-and-dime junk peddler! Talk, before I—" He whirled savagely. "Listic! Put him against the wall again!"

"No," Artie said weakly. "Ace—please! He'll kill me!"

Five-and-dime junk peddler. . . . The phrase echoed in my mind. Junk was dope. Fifty thousand dollars worth. Artie Phister sold it for Ace, too—the way Harry Reed had been going to. Harry would handle the big customers, the way Artie supplied the small-time. All along, I had been thinking Ace Fadden might possibly soften up. Now I knew he wouldn't. A dope merchant would stop at nothing.

Listic had a hand in Artie's collar. The little man was babbling, saliva at his mouth corners. Terror drew the skin tight across his bones. He looked ninety years old. And that, I thought, was trying to romance Marcia Reed. The man was crazy. . . .

"I knew Harry had it," Artie was crying. "But he was no good, Ace. He was going to cross you. He was going to sell the stuff and run for Mexico with Marcia. She told me so. . . ."

Marcia gasped. Bewilderment mingled with the shock on her face. "I—oh, no! No, Ace. . . . You've driven poor Artie out of his mind. . . . We weren't running away from anything. Harry wanted it to be a secret so his friends wouldn't play jokes."

"What was a secret?" demanded Ace.

"Our—our honeymoon. We were going to Mexico. But just the day before—Harry. . . ." Her voice broke.

Listic had Artie half out of the chair. If my mind drew wages, it should have been getting time and a half. I said swiftly, "Add that one up, Ace."

"What about it?"

"You were being played for a Grade-A sucker. You said Harry was to have paid you on Friday—but, Ace, he was heading for Mexico on Thursday. Just one day, Marcia said."

His breath came out slowly. "Yeah."

"Artie says he knew about that double-cross coming up," I went on quickly. "But he didn't tell you—until now. That could have been for two reasons. Either he was in it with Reed—or he was trying a shake-down."

Out of the corner of my eye I saw Artie's gaze dart wildly toward the door. Listic's big hand shook him like a wind flapping a rag. Ace Fadden's face was a tight, ugly mask. He had only one answer for a double-crosser. He stepped toward Artie, his hand tight around the gun in his pocket.

"Ace, no!" Artie cried. "I—I wouldn't cross you! You know I wouldn't cross—"

"Then it was a shakedown," I said. "Artie didn't know Reed was broke. But maybe Artie got cold feet. He just didn't have the guts to go through with it when Reed insisted on meeting him some place Some place like Malibu, Artie?"

THEY were all listening to me, now. All I had was a theory, and what little I had picked up from the insane love Artie Phister had for Marcia Reed. But I kept talking, stalling for time.

"Once you threatened to squeal to Ace, you had to go on, didn't you, Artie? If you met Reed, he might kill you. And if you let him run for Mexico, he'd take Marcia with him. That you couldn't stand."

For a moment, Artie tried to draw himself up. His voice quavered. "He didn't deserve Marcia. He took her from me once. I wasn't going to let him do it again." His tone rose. "A big shot. He and his patronizing air. But he could sell junk like the rest of us when he needed money!"

Ace said thinly, "A rifle. You didn't

have the guts to shoot him where he could see you."

For a moment there was a taut silence. Then a sob tore from Marcia Reed's throat. "No!" she cried. "No!" Her voice rose to a scream. I whirled as a desk drawer clattered.

In that instant Artie Phister broke for the door. The room erupted into flashing sound and sight. Marcia Reed, her face wild with hate, had a little pearl-handled automatic in her hand. I grabbed for the jack handle as Listic clutched toward Artie. The shock went up my arm and Listic crashed onto the cocktail table, which splintered beneath him. Marcia's little automatic began popping.

Artie reached the door, but no farther. As he fell, Ace Fadden spun toward Marcia, the gun half out of his pocket. Then I hurled the jack. I could have cleaned out a carnival's kewpie doll collection with my pitching this night. It slammed against Ace Fadden's shoulder with enough force to break his arm. As his gun fell from nerveless fingers I heard Marcia's automatic click on the empty magazine.

I didn't even look at her. I was staring in disbelief at Harry Reed's jack. Now I knew why there had been something odd in its appearance.

The iron shaft had broken off not half an inch below the bridge, and a white powder lay spilled across the carpet. And I could see, now, where Reed had sawed off the post, filled the hollow jack with the heroin, then replaced the post and camouflaged his job with deft touches of grease and wax.

The hall was filling with jabbering, excited people. Marcia Reed had collapsed in a moaning heap. Ace Fadden's bleak eyes were on his gun—in my hand. And in the doorway, crumpled in the sack-like relaxation of death, lay Artie Phister. As Ace had promised, we'd had quite a blowout.

And even from here, it looked like Artie's bow-tie was finally just a little bit crooked.

DEATH REHEARSAL

By CARROLL
DALY



Willie had stooped by a rain barrel to tie his shoe or he would have been dead too.

Every time he'd shot a gook in Korea, Willie had dreamed of shooting Joe Morello. Now, tonight, the dream was coming true. . . .

AT FIRST it was simply a matter of wondering when he would get some hot food in his stomach and if his hands and feet would ever get warm. The mud never bothered him too much. He was used to that.

They called him Willie Bloto in the

army just as they had called him Willie Bloto back along the waterfront at home. The name Blotoriskive was too much for them in Korea, as it was everywhere else. He didn't mind. He liked it. Even from guys called Smith or Brown or—he smiled—Captain Revinsky, who held his name in-

tact. He knew he was an American now. He learned it from the shrieking shells, the close companionship of the living—and often, too often, the closer companionship of the dead.

He also learned that he wasn't a coward just because he was afraid. Sergeant Jake Reise told him that one night in a ditch full of half-frozen water. Jake had medals and he was afraid—always afraid, he said, when he had time to think about it. It got Jake deep down in the stomach too.

Jake laughed. "It's like skinning eels. You get used to it and learn to live with it."

Some of that was true, Willie agreed. He learned to live with it but he never got used to it. After a while he realized that was good. It was his warning signal. It kept him alert. It kept him alive. Maybe that had something to do with Jake Reise getting it. Willie never knew, but they buried Jake and marked the ground. That was so they could dig him up later and take him home. Dig him up and take him home. Willie shook his head. He didn't want that.

He knew what he was fighting for and it wasn't what they told him. To preserve liberty. To keep law and order at home. To save civilization. That sounded good when he first heard it, with no mud and no shells and no stomach that wanted hot food and often got nothing but the butterflies. You killed to stay alive. You shot them in the back or in the front, and knew it because they screamed out in the dark or lay there silent in the light.

Somehow Willie was a little different. He had a good chance to keep score. That was because he had a knack with a gun. Small arms they called it, but it was a pistol—black and heavy and deadly. In a way it was a lot like the killings back home he read about, or heard from his window or while laying doggo under the dock. Above all it was like the time he had seen Frankie, his best friend, a boy who had gone all through school with him, gunned

down near a deserted brewery at two o'clock one winter morning.

Willie had stooped down by a rain barrel to tie his shoe or he would have been dead too. Dead then or later, if they had seen him. For it was for seeing something he shouldn't have seen that Frankie got it . . .

Willie thought of that now as he lay there in the river bed beside Captain Revinsky and wondered if the boys of that lost patrol over the hummock were dead already. If they weren't, couldn't he and Revinsky inch along close enough to get a shot at that gook sentry? It would have to be close, for neither of them had a rifle.

They said it was times like this that you thought about your stomach and your hands and your feet—and your death. That wasn't true. Willie was thinking about Frankie. He always thought about Frankie and Big Joe Morello.

That night had been clear and cold too, and the wind had come up over the river and swept along the River Road. It was two o'clock, and Big-Joe had swung out from around the corner by the brewery and had almost reached the Farmers' and Citizens' Loft Building. He had a man on each side of him; broad, stocky, swarthy men, who only came up to Big Joe's shoulders but outweighed him perhaps by ten pounds each.

Two men whose hands were sunk deep in their great coat pockets. Two men who jerked up guns and cried out to Frankie to stand where he was while Big Joe slowly and deliberately shot Frankie to death. . . .

Frankie had been even more than a good friend, for it was understood that Willie would marry Frankie's sister, Sally. Understood by Frankie and Willie. But Willie had never asked Sally. He wouldn't. He couldn't, not yet.

THAT was a night that Willie didn't want to remember but he did. He remembered it with horror and shame, and

every time he did, he called himself a coward. Not because he had remained glued close to the barrel while Big Joe stepped forward and emptied his gun into the boy on the sidewalk—the unarmed boy who was coming home from an honest job, the boy who had seen something and was frightened and now was dead. Nothing Willie could have done would have helped Frankie then.

And Willie didn't call himself a coward because he hadn't gone to the police. It had never entered his head. You just didn't do that where he came from. His father taught him that first, then his neighbors. Not that they had anything against the law. The law was all right for some people, but the law was not for their kind.

No, Willie was a coward because of the many nights, the many early mornings at two o'clock, when he had stood in that alley between the brewery and the Farmers' and Citizens' Loft building and watched Big Joe and his two guards swing around the corner and pass briskly by, their feet ringing out in hard quick steps, echoing down the hlock, hammering over the cobblestones of the street.

That's why he was a coward. Because he could see that bobbing head of Big Joe's high above the other two—see it for more than a half block—see it and not put a bullet in it. Sure, he had a gun. He had held it tight in his hand on cold nights when his fingers, he lied to himself, were too numb to press the trigger. Hot nights when his hand sweated so that the gun was slippery and uncertain in his grasp. Always with the one fear. He would miss and he would die. Or he would hit—and Officer Steve McGrath would turn the corner swinging his night-stick, and they'd burn Willie for smoking out a killer—a murderer, perhaps a dozen times over. No, the law wasn't for his kind. . . .

Captain Revinsky nudged him and said, "I got a bead on him, Willie. I don't think we can get any nearer. But our boys will

get back if that gook goes out. Otherwise—" He shrugged his shoulders.

"Okay," said Willie. "Let him have it. No one will hear your gun with that artillery fire over the hill."

"It's a mean shot," Revinsky said. "A real mean shot."

"That's right," said Willie. "And he's got to die—like that."

"Yeah, like that," said the captain. "It's got to be sure. It's—what the hell, Willie; you're a better shot than I am. You do it."

"Me?" Willie stiffened; a little thrill went up his spine. The butterflies lay still and his stomach was suddenly warm and pleasant. Captain Revinsky was a good shot, a fine shot. They even talked about it up and down the line.

"There's nothing the matter with my eyes, nor my fingers, nor even my gun," the captain said when Willie remained silent. "It's like a pinch hitter in baseball, when they need a hit most. They put in the man they can count on in an emergency. You've had a lot of experience, Willie, in shooting when it's needed—more than any man in this outfit, I guess. And you've always pulled it off." Then sharply, "All right, Willie Bloto, take him!"

"Take him." Willie repeated the words as he lay flat and squinted among the trees where the moonlight flickered down on the back of a motionless man. Straight and silent the gook stood, like part of the forest, and a single moonbeam hit on the patch of blackness that was hair on the back of his head.

Willie stretched out his arm. His eyes grew narrow and the pupils became sharp points that took on the power of telescope lenses. As he aimed the two trees on either side of the gook became the squat figures of two men and the gook himself changed. His head became another man's head. Clear and plain and recognizable, as it was every time Willie shot a gook. The forest disappeared and there was the brewery by the river, and there was Big Joe and . . .

Willie's finger tightened and he squeezed the trigger. He wasn't surprised when the figure that was Big Joe crashed headlong.

"Got him, by hell," Captain Revinsky said in awe and admiration.

"What else?" said Willie. There was no gloating or even pride. For he knew—knew the split second the head showed up no longer as the 'gook's but as Big Joe's—that he wouldn't miss. To himself he thought:

That does it. I'll be going home in a week—and then Sally. I'll have the right to ask Sally.

"Look out," Revinsky said as Willie came to his feet. "On your stomach, soldier, if you ever want to reach home."

"I'm not going to die," Willie told him. "Not yet. I got one more killing to do."

Willie was going home. Going home to kill a man and earn the right to marry Sally. It was as simple as that. One more man to kill. He wasn't a coward. He knew that now. Life that had been so confused and complicated was suddenly clear and simple. The alley by the brewery, the heavy rotten old wood, the darkness and the single shot. Killing was so easy. . . .

WILLIE was a hero. His picture was on the front page of the neighborhood weekly newspaper and there was even an item in one of the big city dailies about him. He wore his ribbons. He had to. Sally and her kid brother saw to that, and so did Miss Crawford over at Public School No. 3 where Sally dragged him. They had a beer bust for him down on Pier Eleven, and there was a band and the congressman from his district spoke.

It was a bitter cold night again as it had been two—no, three years ago, with the river wind howling down the alley. Willie was there early, at just a little after midnight.

While he'd been gone things hadn't changed with Big Joe Morello. He was a little more prosperous, a little more arro-

gant and a little more powerful. But he swung around the same corner by the brewery at the same time—two o'clock—and two men walked, one on either side of him. Not the same two men. One had been dug out of the river tied to a slab of cement. The other had shot it out with the cop, Steve McGrath, and was dead. And Steve? Willie seemed to remember that Steve had been hit.

Willie stood with his shoulder pressed hard against the rotten planks and peered up at the corner that Big Joe would come around. His head and hand turned slowly, following the imaginary movement of Joe and his two bodyguards. By the little alley, across the blotch of light where there would be a good view of the back of his head. No gook's head this time—Big Joe's head. Willie nodded. His was a big gun, a powerful gun. At that distance it would blow Joe right into the gutter—the gutter where he belonged.

Oddly enough, there was no hate in Willie's heart. It was like other nights—other men—halfway across the world. A job to be done. One more shot. One more kill.

Then he heard it. The tapping sound back in the old brewery, the shuffling footsteps. In a moment he saw the shadow, moving slowly toward him, veering off to the little watchman's room at the right, hesitating. Willie straightened and called out. The flash found him and pinned him to the wall and the voice spoke.

"Willie! Willie Bloto, the hero!"

Willie knew and he didn't know. He followed the bent figure that pounded the cane down hard before it. The man was sitting on an upturned keg in the little room and stretching out his hands to the oil heater before Willie was sure who he was.

"Didn't know me, eh?" The man's chuckle was a grating noise. "I don't look like the smart young cop who used to chase you from under the docks, do I? Or the stern-faced policeman who ques-

tioned you when he thought you knew something but wouldn't spill it."

"Steve — Steve McGrath!" Willie breathed. Then, "Of course I knew you." But he hadn't. He hadn't at all. Not the lined face. Not those dull sunken eyes, not those bent shoulders nor the trembling hands that gripped the head of the cane.

"I wouldn't blame you for not knowing me," McGrath said. "I have to convince myself when I look in the glass. Take a good look. It's you and the others like you that made me this way."

"Me?" Willie said. "I don't understand."

"No, you don't," McGrath said bitterly. "Because you didn't do it on purpose. None of you ever do anything on purpose—you boys on Dock Street or River Road. You slink around here afraid of your shadow until you make enough money to move away—if you're lucky. But the cops can't move away. They get shot in the back for doing their job, for getting too close to things. To thieves and murderers that you protect."

Willie stiffened. This was all wrong. McGrath couldn't be talking about him. "I never protected a thief and a murderer," he said.

"You did. You all did. You wouldn't tell what you knew. You wouldn't talk. The law of silence. The law of the jungle. The law of the night—the law of murder. Mostly it was because you were cowards. You were afraid."

McGrath shook his head. "I don't know, Willie. I used to think you were simply a coward. But I read the papers and saw your picture and the ribbons. So you aren't a coward. And you aren't a hoodlum either." He shook his head, as if with difficulty. "Just bred in you, I guess; all of you. And so, because the criminal and the honest citizen both are against him, a cop like me gets shot through the spine, protecting people like you."

"Maybe," Willie said slowly, "maybe we should do a little shooting of our own."

"A lot of good that would do!" McGrath

spat and the stove sizzled. "The minute you kill one murderer, you make another for the police to go after—yourself."

He paused, and the vehemence went out of his voice. "Look, Willie, I've been thinking of you ever since I saw your picture in the paper and watched you down on the dock with the band. I've been thinking about it since I came out of the hospital and got this part-time night watchman's job. You're a hero. The kids in school look up to you. Go talk to them, Willie. The older boys under the docks who see and hear and remain silent. The men who slink home and say nothing. Tell them there isn't any use in you and the boys like you cleaning things up all over the world if the guys at home are going to foul their own nests."

Steve McGrath came painfully to his feet. "I'm through here at one thirty," he said. "I can't take the cold and dampness after that."

His voice rose as he moved toward the door. "Tell them that the worst crime is theirs—doing nothing," he growled. "That's the docks for you. That's the River Road for you. They do nothing and they get nothing and they deserve nothing."

Willie Bloto followed the bent, slowly⁴ moving figure. As they reached the street, he said:

"It's the same old story, Steve. I'll get the same old answer. And it's true. The law ain't for our kind."

"The law ain't for your kind!" Steve McGrath swung suddenly and for a moment he seemed to straighten. "That's a hot one, Willie. That's the cry of the weaklings and the cowards and the do-nothings. Tell them the truth—the real truth. That their kind ain't for the law!"

He was gone and Willie Bloto stood alone on the cold deserted road. *The law ain't for our kind*, he thought, and then half aloud, *Our kind ain't for the law. . . .*

It was a good slogan. Then he told himself that was all it was—a slogan. Words. Talk . . . Talk to the kids, Steve McGrath

had said. A lot of good talk would do. Why, a single press of a trigger and the roar of a gun would do more good than all the talk in the world.

WILLIE went back into the alley and took his place against the rotten planks again. It was cold but not so cold as those nights in Korea, nor the night when Frankie got it. Five minutes more, he thought grimly, and Big Joe Morello would swing around the corner with his quick assured step, and pass under the light where Willie had shot Big Joe to death every night for the past two years.

Talk. Suppose he had talked then, to the cops? Would they have believed him? Now, sure they would believe him, because he was a hero and his picture was in the paper and they had honored him down on the dock. But he wasn't a hero when it happened to Frankie. He was just another guy on River Road.

Talk. How much did he know? He thought back. There was Pressy Evans who had bludgeoned old Dunn and robbed his store. If Willie had talked then, Pressy wouldn't have been around to knife Kitty Blake. . . . It was surprising how much he had known and never told. He hadn't gone around looking for trouble either. And there were any number of other decent kids, too, who knew plenty. He grinned. Steve McGrath was right. If enough people talked, one truth would back up another truth and

the cops would have to believe them. . . .

Willie Bloto stiffened. He jerked his ungloved hand from his coat pocket and steadied his gun against the old rotten wood. He straightened his arm, flexed his wrists and tightened his finger a little around the trigger.

Big Joe Morello swung the corner and was coming down River Road, a squat figure on either side of him. Just as he always came.

Heavy and confident, three pairs of feet pounded down on the pavement against the silence of the winter morning. McGrath had aged but Big Joe hadn't. He was merely a little heavier around the waist.

What had McGrath said? *Your kind ain't for the law.* And McGrath blamed him, his silence, his apathy, for the bullet in his spine. One bullet now. One bullet to square things for two people. For Frankie and Steve McGrath.

Big Joe's head was high and his shoulders were thrust back as he approached the light. Joe Morello's head all the way this time—not a gook's head to turn suddenly into Big Joe's. This was really Joe's head, and it would be Joe's head when the lead went in.

A single shot and a murderer dead on the sidewalk. . . . What else had McGrath said? Willie felt his whole body tighten. The back of the head was there now, with the street light glinting on the black hair.

(Continued on page 109)

AMAZING THING! *By Cooper*

SENSATIONAL NEW TING CREAM FOR FOOT ITCH (ATHLETE'S FOOT)
- REGULAR USE HELPS RELIEVE ITCHING - SOOTHES BURNING BETWEEN CRACKED PEELING TOES - AIDS HEALING AMAZINGLY!



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TING MUST SATISFY YOU IN A WEEK - OR MONEY BACK!

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EVEN IF OTHER PRODUCTS HAVE FAILED TRY AMAZING TING CREAM TODAY! GREASELESS, STAINLESS ALL DRUGGISTS ONLY 60¢ A TUBE



DANNY, GET YOUR GUN!

The syndicate was too big to fight, Dan's girl said. But San Francisco was Dan's town—and too big to throw away!

By **DICK GOGGIN**



"Don't be silly, Danny. It's empty. Its only bullet is in Regan."

◆ ◆ ◆
HE COVERED the last two steps in one jump. In the dark November evening the street lamps had just flicked on, and one of them cast its light directly across the porch in front of him. He rang the bell and pounded on the door

but no one answered him. He waited a moment, then stepped back and threw himself against the dirty, weatherbeaten oak frame. It gave easily and Flood ran down the hall to Regan's apartment. He paused again, ringing the small buzzer and rattling the brass door handle. He was drawing back when the knob turned in his hand and the door gave. He flung it open and walked into the narrow room.

It wasn't bad. A three-way floor lamp lighted the dark wine rug, shutting off the room from the dark night alley. Then he saw Regan. The red-headed little bookmaker was sprawled back in a leather chair, dead.

"You're Flood, aren't you?" said a voice from behind him. Something heavy and solid hit Flood in the back at the same time. He spun around.

"Pick it up," the guy said. He was a clean, neat man with a friendly edge of laughter in his voice. "Go ahead," he said. "It's only a gun. It won't bite you."

Flood stared at him for a moment and then started toward him. But the guy had another gun in his hand and he seemed very familiar with it. "I wouldn't do it, Danny. I don't think you'd get very far."

"All right."

"That's the boy. Pick up the gun, Danny. It's yours, a nice, shiny black one. Go on, Flood, pick it up."

Flood reached down and slowly picked the gun up.

"I'm Frank Marston. I'm your friend, Danny." He looked a little embarrassed. "And your new boss."

Flood half-turned, momentarily expecting Jimmie Regan to cock one eye, grin, and say, "You get it, Dan? You get it, boy?" And then Regan would lean back in his leather chair, laughing and laughing and laughing.

Marston caught the gesture and shook his head. "I had to transfer Regan to our Chicago office. He never got to understand our organization thoroughly."

Flood stood there, wonderingly, like a man waking out of a nightmare, puzzled and uncertain in what should be a familiar room.

"Let's see, now." Marston walked over and sat down in the wooden maple chair opposite Regan. "You were mad at Regan about something, weren't you, Danny?"

Flood said nothing, trying to make some connection between Marston and the dead bookmaker.

"Were you really going to kill him yourself? Or were you just going to work him over a little?" Marston laid his gun on the curved arm of the chair and took out his cigarettes. "Or does it matter?" He wagged his head as if he were reasoning with himself. "Not really, I guess." He lit a cigarette and held the package toward Flood. "Sit down, Danny. Sit down, have a smoke. Don't stand there like a dummy."

Nothing made sense. Flood stood there, listening.

"I said, 'Sit down, Danny.' Didn't you hear me?"

Flood spoke from way back in his throat, forming each word very carefully. "Go ahead," he said. "Go ahead, Marston. You're calling them."

MARSTON smiled. "Now that's the right attitude. I'm glad to see that in a Frisco boy." He acted as pleased as a small child. "I told them there were sensible people in Frisco." He turned his eyes from the gun completely and took a notebook from the inside pocket of his sack-suit. "Let's see, now." He skipped several pages, ran his finger down a page until he found what he was looking for. "Daniel Flood. 34. Owns a launderette at 498 Mission Street. Hard worker . . ."

"What's the game, Marston?"

"Be patient, Danny. They told me people were slow and easy in Frisco. I don't want to think somebody made a fool out of me." He laughed a little and went on reading: "'Engaged to Eileen Hayes, who

works with you in your launderette.' " He lifted his eyes from the book. "These are fine recommendations, Daniel. You sound exactly like the kind of guy I'm after." He read again. "'A good friend of Jimmie Regan except for a slight question of Miss Hayes and the business Jimmie ran.' Tsk. Tsk. He was a bad, bad boy, wasn't he?"

"Get to the point, Marston."

"Don't talk to me like that, Flood. I'm very serious about this. I expect exact obedience. When I don't get it, it bothers me. When it bothers me enough, I kill people. Take a look at Regan, Flood. Take a good look. So you'll believe me."

He waited very patiently while Flood's eyes shifted to the little redheaded guy and back again. "All right? Now then, this isn't exact. If I'm wrong, fill me in on the details. Regan told you we were organizing the launderettes in Frisco. You told him off. But he told Eileen we kill people, and she paid up."

This isn't real, thought Flood. These things don't happen to people like me. I've got to get back to work. Every machine in the shop is loaded; both dryers are going full blast. . . . But Regan didn't move and Marston went on talking.

"You got sore this morning. So you came here and banged Jimmie around. That's good. I like that." He opened up and really laughed. "I should—I planned it. But even I didn't expect Eileen to call up the cops. I guess maybe she liked Jimmie a little too, Danny. Women are like that. But cops aren't, are they? They don't go for every little kid story about gangsters they hear. They have more sense."

It was clearing up. "Then you—"

"Danny." Marston wagged his head. "You talk too much. What are you trying to tell me? That maybe the cops are paid off? This isn't important, Danny. What's important is that they'll figure you were mad enough to come back and kill Regan. You can see that, can't you? That's why I had him call you up and tell you to come

see him again." He leaned back in the maple chair and smiled. "How you like that, Danny? Not so bad? Hell—it's perfect."

"You're up the wrong tree, Marston. I don't want to play."

"No, I'm not. You'll play. You'll love it. Being dead's a long time." He reached into his pocket and took out another notebook. "Settle back, Danny. Relax. That was all the bad news. I want to talk business with you now."

"There's sixty-three launderettes in Frisco. I want to see every one of them with a sign outside their door that says: *Your Guarantee Is a Dan Flood Shop.*" He paused to let it sink in. "You're going to be the boss, Danny. And they're all going to pay you a hundred bucks a month just to use your name." He flipped the book shut and replaced it. "You won't even have to set foot outside your door. I'll see that they get there. And once a month, we'll have lunch together and you'll give seventy-five of each hundred to Frank Marston. That's me."

"And if I don't?"

"You will. They put people in the gas chamber for killing their friends. Even in Frisco."

Flood tightened his fingers around the gun that Marston had thrown at him.

"That's just silly, Danny. It's empty. The bullet from it is in Regan. You know that."

Flood's eyes began smarting, a hot, dry smart, as if all his anger were settling there.

"You won't bust. After a while, you'll forget how mad you are. Believe me, Danny, we'll be two of the best partners in Frisco."

YOU know how you feel when you belong to a town? When people talk to you a moment or two and say, "Oh, you're from. . . ." It was like this with Eileen Hayes. She couldn't have been from any

place but San Francisco. It had taken a young lifetime of living in the sun and fog and wind and rain and looking at the hill-broken, bridge-broken salt water to make Eileen Hayes. She ran toward Flood when she saw him come in. "Danny, what's wrong?"

He gestured impatiently at the customers who'd looked up as he entered the shop. "Come on in back, Eileen. I want to talk with you."

"But the customers . . ."

"They'll wait."

She followed him into the back room. "Did you see Jimmie?"

"Yes. He was dead, Eileen. A guy named Marston killed him."

"Jimmie? Jimmie Regan?"

"That's right," he said steadily.

She began trembling as if she were trying to shake his words out of her mind. "You're fooling!" The tears started in her eyes and she fought them down. "You're not telling me the truth, Danny Flood."

"Yes, I am."

She was crying now.

"It's tough, Eileen."

It was taking her a long time to understand. "You?"

"Not me. A guy named Marston. Jimmie worked for him."

"Danny!" The understanding sprang in her eyes and she moved back from him, all hunched up. A window was open and the fog eddied in from the alley in back of the shop. It mixed briefly with the hot bright light of the swinging overhead lamp before it dissolved and disappeared.

"I'm going to call Joe up, Eileen. This guy didn't talk like anyone from San Francisco."

"Don't!" She turned her back on him and walked over to the open window. It was hard to hear her. "I don't want you to call Pa. I don't want you to."

"Why? Why not, Eileen? You don't think your father has any connection with this, do you?"

"I'm scared, Danny. I don't know what to think."

"Joe Hayes never stuck his nose in this kind of a deal. He never bothered guys like me."

"He's an old man, Danny." She turned back from the window and faced him. "I don't want anything to happen to him."

Flood shook his head. "I don't get it. You sound as if you knew something."

Her voice was coming through the tears now, strong and firm. "What's the use of kidding ourselves, Danny? Jimmie dealt poker for Pa for years. I never really fooled myself about him. Or Pa either. They were no good. You know it and I know it."

"No, I don't." Flood took her in his arms and held up her face to his. "No good's strong talk. Your old man's not that kind of no good. You know that, Eileen."

"I don't know. I don't know anything. But listen, Danny, keep him out of this. You hear me, keep him out of this."

"I can't. Don't you see that I can't? I can't handle this alone, Eileen. This Marston's in business—murder."

"Then I'll tell you. So you'll know. He's been coming in and out of our house for weeks."

Flood heard the steady beat of the big gas flames in the dryers and the mixed roll and wash of the long row of Bendix machines. That was all for a moment. Then he said, "This is rough, Eileen."

"Don't be sorry for me, Danny. I'm probably the reason they dragged you into this."

"I'm not sorry for you," Flood said slowly. "It just makes it tougher."

"It's hopeless. Don't you see that, Danny? One man can't go against them. There are too many of them. They plan things too well."

"I see what you mean. But I saw Regan too. A fight's one thing. That I understand. But killing a guy is different."

"It mightn't be so bad, Dan. If we waited a while . . ."

"You don't know what you're saying, Eileen. I want to live in this town the rest of my life. And I want to look at people." He waved at the shop. "I haven't waited for you and sweated out this business for five years to turn it over to the first guy who walks in and asks for it."

"I can't help you with this then. You know that, Danny."

"Sure, I can see that." He looked at her very carefully for a moment or two. "That's all right," he said. "That's the way it'll be."

SAN FRANCISCO'S full of surprises. You, walk past a white, modern hospital, and an ice cream store, and a grocery store, and a quiet little shop on a corner with venetian blinds; and you're almost across the street, still thinking of the hospital, when your ear catches the hot, busy voice on the radio. The doorman was bending over an automobile, pretending to fix the engine when Flood walked up to him.

"You can stop playing, Tommy. Open up for me. will you?"

"Dan Flood! I'll be damned. What's with you, boy?"

"Open up for me, will you, Tom?"

The glad look faded from the doorman's face and he straightened up from the engine. "You got a card, Dan?"

"A card? What do you mean, a card?"

"It's a new rule, Dan. Everybody's got to have cards."

Flood looked at him for a moment. "San Francisco's kind of going to hell, isn't it, Tom?"

"I don't know about that," the doorman said. "I don't know much about anything any more. I only know you got to have a card."

"I don't have one. Is it against the law for you to go in and tell Joe Hayes I want to see him?"

"You stick here, Dan. I'll be right out."

In a few minutes the side door opened and the doorman waved Flood in. The beaten-up mahogany bar was gone; and a short dark man in a spotless white mess jacket was mixing drinks beneath the fluorescent lights. "How about it, Dan?"

"It's different, Tom. Damn different." Flood watched the bar for a second. "It stinks," he said. "Where's Joe?"

The doorman shrugged his shoulders. "Upstairs, I'll show you his office." Flood followed him into the big room with the wall racing boards and the chattering groups of horse-players that milled restlessly in it. Everything was new and shiny—too new and too shiny. Flood tightened his lips as he hurried up the stairs behind the doorman.

"Dan!" Hayes was big. He towered almost a head over Flood. "It's good to see you. Come on in."

Flood walked in, half-hesitantly. "You've changed your office, haven't you, Joe?"

"I felt kind of lonesome in the big office. I like it better here."

"That's good. I'd hate to think Joe Hayes was stepping down for anyone."

Hayes straightened up in the leather swivel chair. "I never stepped down for anyone in my life," he said. But he pulled out his handkerchief and slowly wiped his forehead. "You know me better than that, Dan."

Flood looked at the wrinkled handkerchief. "You're giving that a lot of use, Joe." He suddenly walked around the desk and dropped into a chair alongside Hayes. "What's the use of stalling? You know why I'm here. I didn't believe it till I walked in. All that fancy junk downstairs. That's not your idea. What's going on, Joe?"

Hayes put his feet up on the desk and took them down again. He walked over to the window and walked back again. He opened his mouth and closed it. Finally he stared at Dan silently for almost a minute.

"There's been a few changes," he said. "I—I don't own the club any more."

Flood watched him, saying nothing.

"It was no use, Dan. That's the truth of it. We got snowed under. These boys are too high speed."

Flood sat there. Hayes had started in San Francisco with just two hands and hunger. But he'd owned one mayor and he used to shuffle supervisors like a deck of cards. The small office seemed to grow smaller.

"Without a fight? You let these Eastern guys walk in under your nose?"

"Times change. The boys don't live South of the Slot any more. Nob Hill, Danny. Pacific Street."

"But the cops?"

Hayes shook his head. "The cops got to have something to go on, Dan. Someone's got to tell them stories. And it's not going to be me." He looked very old and very tired. "These boys fly back and forth to Washington, Flood."

"You mean Marston has this town crawling. Is that it?"

"Not Marston. Marston's only here to sew things up."

Flood got to his feet. "I don't get it, Joe. I don't get it at all."

"It'd take a big wheel to get them out now, Dan. Someone who could put this thing on the front pages with facts to back it up."

Flood looked down at him. "Someone like Joe Hayes used to be—is that what you mean, Joe?"

The guy had opened the door quietly and gotten in without either of them noticing. He hit Flood very hard—in the neck—just beneath the left ear lobe. Flood pitched against the wall, rocking. He sagged a little and then turned—right into it. His head banged against the wall.

"That's enough," Marston said. "Let him sit down."

The guy caught Flood beneath the shoulders and helped him back into the chair

opposite Hayes. Marston waited till he had him settled.

"This is getting to be like old times already, isn't it?" He laughed and shook his head. "I thought I told you I'd come and visit you."

Hayes straightened in his chair. "Listen, Marton. . . ."

Marston turned his head. "Shut up, Hayes. When I want your advice, I'll ask for it." He turned to Dan. "I won't be long, Flood. Two things. One . . ." He motioned to the guy. The guy walked to Flood, leaned over, and hit him in the face. "I told you to wait till I called," Marston said. "Two . . ." The guy hit Flood again in the same place. Marston pulled out a handkerchief and wiped his hands carefully. "Our Chicago office has plenty of vacancies, Flood. But take a tip. The climate is lousy."

IT WAS past closing time when Flood got back to his shop. The fog had given way to a cold, blowing rain. When Flood walked in, Eileen was standing behind the counter, counting the receipts. A little man with a bald head was sitting on the end chair in the customer's row. He sat very stiffly on the edge, with his knees held tight together and out straight, like a little kid. When he saw Flood, he got up. "You're Dan Flood?"

"That's right," said Flood. "What can I do for you?"

In spite of his own pain, he nearly got sick to his stomach. The bald-headed guy had a square of one-inch gauze on his left cheek. A strip of adhesive tape ran across his right ear. And he kept grabbing his left leg with both hands as if it hurt him.

"I know when I've had enough," the guy said. He took his billfold from his pocket and pulled out some money. "I don't want any receipt for this, Mr. Flood. And I don't want you to think I'm mad at you. I just want to give you this hundred dollars—now." He suddenly winced and

rubbed his stomach. "I'll get the sign up first thing in the morning."

Flood stepped back from him. "Wait a minute. I don't know who did what to you, but you're in the wrong shop. I don't want your money."

The bald-headed guy blinked rapidly but he kept right on talking as if he hadn't heard Flood. "I remember very carefully what they told me. They said, 'Give the money to Flood and give it to him tonight. You got that?'" He brightened up like a kid going to school who realizes that he's finally got his lesson down pat. "I'm not likely to forget what those guys told me, Mr. Flood." He put the money on the counter. "Now, please," he said, "you call them up and tell them I did like I was told, will you, Mr. Flood?"

Flood picked up the money, held it for a moment, and then tossed it to Eileen. "Keep this separate." He turned back to the bald-headed guy. "I'll tell them. I'll tell them right away. You don't have to worry about it any more."

"Thanks, Mr. Flood. I'll see you next month. Good-by." He walked out into the rain, favoring his left leg.

Flood locked the door, pulled the shade down, and walked back to the counter. Eileen took her eyes from the door and looked at him, her hands clenched tightly by her sides.

He said, "How did you like it, Eileen?" She shook her head slowly as if the effort of moving it were painful. "Remember what you said, Eileen? 'It mightn't be so bad. For a little while,' you said." He stood there for a second. "I hope you took a good look at him. The rest of them probably won't be as bad."

She reached out one hand to touch Flood's face, and shook her head again bewilderedly. "I don't know. . . ." she started. Then she broke off and put her head down on the counter, crying "I can't, I can't!" she said. "Don't you see that I can't?" She lifted her head, shaking. "I called my

father, Danny. He told me to warn you. He said Marston would kill us if we did anything."

"That isn't the way it's going to be, Eileen. That's not the way it's going to be at all."

* * *

He was in the drugstore longer than he'd thought he'd be. But when he'd finally gotten through to Marston, Marston had gone for his story. It wasn't till he'd left the phone booth that he'd started to sweat. And in the relief of it, he leaned against the wall of the booth for a moment. He lit a cigarette and took a deep drag of it. Then he checked his watch. This was the key. Ten forty-five. He shouldn't have left Eileen so long alone. Flood waved at the owner of the drugstore and walked out rapidly.

The shop was dark when he got back, but when he tried the door handle, the door opened to his touch. He paused a moment, trying to remember if he'd locked it or left it open. He stood there a moment, shaking his head puzzledly and then walked in. The big door to the right hand dryer was open. He looked quickly all over the shop and then walked to the dryer.

The sheets nearly covered her but not quite. The skirt of her beige sports dress had slipped up and he could see the round line on her thighs where the garters caught her stockings. Her legs were bent double along the slope of the machine, as if she were a very limp doll someone had gotten tired of playing with and had thrown into the dryer.

He pulled his eyes from her and looked around the shop again. Two of the washers were smashed, and a heap of dirty clothes were spread over the floor. The drawer to the cash register was open, and some change and bills were scattered on the counter. Flood took it all in very slowly. Then he ran to the phone on the counter and dialed the number.

"I want to talk to Joe Hayes. All right. I'll wait. . . . Joe? . . . Dan Flood. Can you get out to my shop right away? . . . Now. Get a cab then." He took a deep breath. "I can't talk. It's Eileen. . . . Right. I'll wait for you."

IT TOOK Hayes ten minutes to get there. Flood stood in the doorway and watched him pay off the cab driver, turn and hurry across the street into the shop. "What's this all about, Flood? Where's Eileen?"

Flood pointed. "Take a look, Joe. Take a good look."

Hayes stretched out his arms for her, stopped, turned, and stared dumbly at Flood. "Who?"

"Your friends, Joe. The high-speed boys. Who else?"

"Marston?"

"Yes. Get hold of yourself, Joe. We've got work to do. Did anyone see you leave the club?"

Hayes shook his head. "I don't think so." He looked at Eileen again and put his hands up to cover his face. "Why, Flood. Why?"

"It's my fault, I guess. She told me she was going to the papers with this and I didn't believe her. They must have found out about it."

Hayes straightened up. "She told me she wouldn't. She promised me." He looked at Flood bewilderedly, as if he were trying to figure out some secret in the man that would explain this. "She must have really loved you, Flood."

He nodded his head as if that explained many things. "I think she was right," he said slowly. He lowered his voice till Flood scarcely heard him. "They scared me. They scared me till I didn't know what I was doing. I couldn't think straight." He opened up his eyes and they looked very bright and alert. "Have you got a gun, Dan?"

Flood nodded. Hayes turned and walked

toward the dryer. "We'd better take her out, Dan. I don't like her in there." He stopped and sniffed. "What's that smell, Dan?"

Flood was looking at the clock. The second hand crept around the big open-faced dial, taking a measured moment with each shifting movement. "Chloroform, I think. They must have put her out with it first."

Hayes nodded his head understandingly and started to reach inside the dryer. Suddenly he ducked, slammed the dryer and dove behind the row of washers. "Dan! The door!"

The terrifying racket of gunfire filled the shop. When the first bullet gouged a deep splintered trough in the corner of the counter, Flood had already fallen to his knees and slid beneath the two dryers. Marston and the guy with him ran for opposite ends of the shop, firing in unison nearly a minute apart.

The guy with Marston had almost reached the safety of the first washer in the row when one of Hayes' shots slapped off the bright enamel and tore through his right cheek. He kept looking toward Hayes and moving for the safety of the washer. But something gave way and he grinned foolishly as he settled down on the floor of the shop.

Hayes began to move toward the guy, and Flood yelled. But he was too late. The brief movement had shown Hayes to Marston, and Flood heard the bullets hitting Hayes. The big man straightened up as if a heavy puncher had belted him solidly in the left shoulder, spinning him around. The second bullet hit him just above the stomach on the righthand side. For a moment Hayes tried to hold himself together. Then he fell down.

Flood didn't shoot. He edged along the side of the dryers till he reached the back wall. Then he raised himself on his knees, and crept slowly down to the end of the one nearest the rear of the shop. He jerked

back suddenly as he saw the clothes on the long standing iron racks opposite him vibrate slightly. He watched them till the vibrations moved halfway down the line, and then he aimed carefully and fired. He listened but there was no splatter of the bullet against the cheap plaster wall of the shop. He fired three more times, spacing his shots along the clothes rack as carefully as he could. Then he raised himself up and dove across the shop toward the middle of the line of clothes. He was right; Marston was there. But Flood could have taken all the time he wanted to walking across the floor.

He left Marston lying there and hurried back to Hayes. The man kept trying to raise himself up but he fell back each time. Flood looked down at him for a second and then opened the dryer door. He reached in and untied Eileen. The chloroform was wearing off fast, and she was struggling and fighting him as he slipped the clothes line off her legs. When he got her out, she struck at him and then bent over Hayes.

"I didn't tell the papers, Pa. I didn't."

Hayes smiled up at her. "All right. All right, Eileen. You didn't." He coughed up blood and it trickled down the right corner of his mouth. "Tell me, Flood. Go ahead, tell me. It's okay."

Flood knelt down beside him. "I had to get you on our side, Joe. I couldn't figure it any other way. You're the only man in San Francisco who could stop them. I called Marston and told him it was the city desk of the *Chronicle*. I told him that Eileen had spilled the deal on Regan and

said she'd give them the rest of the dope at her house."

Hayes listened very closely, watching Flood. "I get it. He went after her first at our house. That's why he was late." He smiled a little, all over his mouth. "You laid yourself an awful tight bet, Flood."

"I fixed Eileen and the shop before I called them." He stopped and looked at Hayes steadily. "This I didn't figure on, Joe."

Hayes lifted one arm and pulled Eileen down to him. "You heard what the guy said, Eileen. You can't kick at a game when the other guy plays himself in as deep as he does you." She put her face on his chest, crying. "Pick it up," he said. "Pick it up."

She raised her face and looked at Flood. "Help me with him, Danny. We'll try to make it easier for him."

Hayes sighed a little as they lifted him up against the front of the dryer. "I didn't want to live much anyway the way it was. This way, I'm Joe Hayes again." He pulled a notebook from his pocket. "You take this, Flood. Marston's not the only boy who carried facts and figures." He started to close his eyes but then he opened them again. "I'm not going to go till the paper guys get here. They'll believe it when I tell them." He brightened up and looked at them very clearly.

"You take good care of her, Dan Flood," he said. "She's a San Francisco girl." He laughed awkwardly. "You know, I always hated the way that jerk called it Frisco anyway."

REVERSE ENGLISH

A Spokane bandit, after robbing a man, was unable to get away in a stalled auto. So he offered to give his victim some of his money back if he'd give the car a boost.

North Carolina has been offering a jail-management course, causing one paper to suggest: "How about zebra-skin diplomas, instead of the traditional sheepskin?"

—H. H.

FELONY FOLLIES

by Jakobsson and Waggener

Maybe it was telepathy—maybe it was coincidence. For awhile, the police of Rosario, Argentine, were willing to believe either explanation when Pedro de Alcala, well-off young citizen, began warning them excitedly about crimes that were about to happen, and whose coming, he said, he had learned of in his dreams. Pedro's predictions came true once too often—even a murder he'd predicted came off on schedule—and suspicious authorities threw him in solitary. But he went right on dreaming in his cell—predicted six crooks would blow up the vault of the National Bank that very night.

Was it coincidence? The attempt actually was made, and nipped in the bud by law officers. Pedro was released, and no further explanation of the phenomenon has been advanced.



Two purse-proud Texans got to arguing, one night last June, about who had the most money. Neither, however, would produce proof—and in the end, it was the richer one, Charley Jones, who got stabbed to death. The San Antonio police, when they arrested the killer, were loath to accept his explanation of the quarrel—for in the pocket of Charley's corpse, all they found was six cents.

"Guess he won at that," said Charley's killer sadly. He pulled out his own pockets. They held nothing at all.

Police of Juneau, Wisconsin, were completely mystified by a series of gas station robberies, some years ago, but not because they had no idea of the burglar's identity. They had a good idea. The *modus operandi* suggested none other than that master thief of the green north woods, good-tempered little Glen Norenberg—but Norenberg had been safe in the cooler for some time.

One night, they caught their man in the act—and it was Norenberg indeed, had been Norenberg all along. Seems he'd picked his cell lock when he felt the urge, done his stealing and caching, and then returned to the hoosegow. They asked him why he'd re-imprisoned himself. He only laughed. Best hideout he'd ever found, he said.



Camilo Leyra, Jr., killed his elderly parents for their money. However, before he could enjoy their inheritance, he found himself in New York's Sing Sing death house. Puzzled, he asked detectives, "What happens to my folks' estate now?" For he had been an only child, and there seemed to be no other heirs.

Shortly after, he got an answer of sorts. A hardware store forwarded to him in the death house a bill for a ball-peen hammer, which he had purchased from them. and then used to kill his mother and father.

The estate paid his debt.



MURDER and THE MERMAID



"Sav, this is Lloyd King's
boat, isn't it?"

THE angry cry for help finally penetrated Gilchrist's reverie over his fishing rod. Something splashed into the dark water of the bay not five feet from him, then drifted slowly by. It was a cushion-type life preserver. His head

jerked around and his surprised glance found a sixteen-foot speedboat about fifty feet away, rolling slightly in the path of the moonlight. A girl, very briefly clad in a swim suit, was standing on the hatch, winding up with another cushion. It came

By **LARRY HOLDEN**

*Rescuing a red-headed
mermaid in distress
can be a dangerous
business — especially,
Gil found, when she's
adrift in a boat that
belongs to a corpse!*



scaling over the water at him, and he ducked as it flew over his head and plunked into the bay beyond.

He cried, "Hey!"

"Are you deaf? I've been yelling my lungs out."

"I didn't hear you. I was fishing."

"Does it affect your ears?"

"I'm sorry. What's the trouble?"

"The darn thing won't go. That's what's the trouble. Are you going to help me out of here, or aren't you?"

Gil laughed. "Well," he said, "since you put it so plaintively, I'll be right over."

He hauled up the cement block that served as an anchor, then sat down and fitted the oars into the locks. It was a long heavy cypress boat, and it moved sluggishly through the water.

"You know," said the girl as he came closer, "I lost money on a horse named Shirttail once. He moved just about as fast as you do. Come on, Shirttail. You're beginning to creep up. They can't hold you down now. Are you sure you pulled up your anchor?"

Gil gave a final heave, pulled in his oars and drifted to the side of the speedboat. He looked up at the girl and blinked. The way she filled her swim suit was something to see. When he finally came to her eyes, he saw that they were long, slightly tilted and frankly mocking. Her red hair was gathered in some peculiar fashion at the back of her head that made it look like a short plume that had been plugged in.

"When you finish," she said coolly, "would you mind having a look at the boat, too?"

He flushed and stepped over the gunwale into the forward cockpit of the speedboat. He pushed the starter button and flipped the light switch. Nothing happened. He checked the ignition key, to see that it was turned on, then said:

"It's your battery. It's dead."

"Can't you give me a push or something to get it started, like a car?"

"It doesn't work with a boat." Then, as if suddenly seeing the sleek lines of the speedboat for the first time, "Say, this is Lloyd King's boat, isn't it?"

"I wouldn't know." Her voice was still cool. "All I know is that it's half mine, now. That's the salvage law. I found it floating in the Gulf."

"In the Gulf!"

"Yes. The Gulf of Mexico. It's right over there. I was swimming and I saw the boat and I caught it, so it's half mine."

"Wasn't Lloyd around? Maybe he was swimming, too."

"Underwater? I didn't see him. And the boat wasn't anchored. It was just drifting." Her voice rose angrily. "If you're saying I stole this boat. . ."

"Shucks, no," Gil grinned. "I was just wondering if maybe you didn't leave Lloyd to walk home. You're from the hotel, aren't you? He's staying there, too. He owns it, in fact."

The girl was silent. "This Lloyd King," she said at length. "Is he that bald-headed wolf in an Adolphe Menjou mustache and the Arthur Godfrey sport shirt?"

"I don't know anything about his being a wolf."

"Well, I do, and I shall take the greatest pleasure in informing him that he owes me one half of his speedboat. Can—can you tow it in?"

"You'll have to take an oar," Gil grinned.

"With pleasure, Shirttail, with pleasure. All I want is to see the look on Mr. King's face when I tell him I salvaged his boat." She climbed down into the rowboat.

SHE pulled a good oar, Gil had to admit. It was slow work, even though the bay was calm, for the heavy speedboat had been built to plane over the water, not nose through it. The girl pulled willingly, but when he heard her begin to pant, he rested on his oar and suggested a pause.

"You've had trouble with Lloyd?" he asked curiously.

"I met him only once, but he seemed to think that all he needed to further our acquaintance was a dark corner. I didn't even know his name. I met him at the bar. He suggested a walk on the patio, and the minute we were outside, he started to ripen our friendship in Braille. And now if you're fully rested, Shirttail, let's go, huh?"

"I was giving you a rest," said Gil indignantly. "And the name is Gil Gilchrist."

"I'm Nora Carroll, but you'll always be Shirttail in my heart. Heave ho."

The hotel boatman came down the dock to help them tie up when they finally nosed into the pilings. Gil threw him the line. "Make sure Mr. King's boat is tied up this time," he said. "Miss Carroll just found it floating in the Gulf."

The boatman was shocked. "It's those kids from the hotel, Mr. Gilchrist. Always fooling around the boat, and this being our slack season, I'm mostly working in the hotel and can't keep an eye on them. Did you see Mr. King, sir? He was trying to get you on the phone about three hours ago."

"I was fishing. Did he go out in his boat after me?"

"I wouldn't know that, sir. I was in the hotel. All I know is he was looking for you."

"Mr. King should have been looking for his boat," said Nora Carroll. "He'd have found it more profitable."

"Yes, ma'am. I just hope he don't blame this on me. Them kids is always—"

Nora compressed her lips and strode up the dock toward the hotel. Gil strode after her and caught her elbow.

"You'll be getting the boatman in trouble," he said.

"Oh shut up!" she blurted. "I didn't want salvage on the boat, anyway. I just wanted to make Lloyd King mad. I can't stand a senior wolf. Come on, I'll buy you a drink in the bar, Shirttail. I owe you that much."

"No thank you," said Gil gravely. "I

never drink with a woman who doesn't respect me."

He turned and walked away from the hotel. He was still chuckling twenty minutes later when he turned into the rough marl road through the mangrove and sea grape that led to the shack on the edge of the slash through the jungly growth. The gaunt silhouette of a steam shovel lifted stiffly against the sky, and beside it stood the round-shouldered bulk of a big bulldozer. The road opened unexpectedly to a broad, moon-sparkled lake.

Gil stood for a moment on the bank and looked at it with pride. He had made that lake. Not made it exactly, but re-made it. It had been, or had looked like, just another unclaimable mangrove swamp that made the southern end of Gasparilla Key worthless, but it was and always had been a lake. The outlet to the bay had been so choked that the lake had overflowed its banks for an area almost three miles in length. If it had really been a swamp, the cost of draining would have been prohibitive. But the old maps on file in Tallahassee had showed the lake. The steam shovel had reopened the old channel to the bay, and now the lake was assuming its former shape, leaving dry acres of valuable building land. The northern end of the key was fashionable—and over crowded. Now this end would build up.

Gil turned to the shack, on which stood the sign: *GILCHRIST & LENAHAN, Development Engineers*. There was a light inside, and through the window, Gil could see Vince Lenahan lying on his cot, reading a detective magazine. Vince was a bull of a man with harsh red hair and a deep, powerful chest.

Vince turned his head on his pillow as Gil entered and said, "What're you grinning about?" He reached for the bottle of scotch on the floor beside the cot.

"Not you, tosspot," Gil said good naturedly.

He told Vince the story of Nora Carroll

and Lloyd King's boat. Vince's jaw dropped.

"What's the matter?" asked Gil. "I thought you'd laugh."

"Laugh! Listen, dimwit, while you're laughing, the Coast Guard pulled Lloyd King out of the Gulf with a hole in his head and his brains leaking out. It just came over the radio."

"What!"

"And it wasn't suicide, pal. This dame you were talking about— she said she found Lloyd's boat?" Vince's harsh red eyebrows lifted. "That's what my old lady used to call a likely story."

"Now wait a minute, Vince. That girl . . ."

"Okay, okay." Vince shrugged his massive shoulders and took a long pull from the bottle of scotch. "A good-looking chick, eh?"

GIL smiled faintly, remembering the superlative contents of the brief swim suit. "So-so," he said. "But she wanted to take the boat in, Vince. She wasn't trying to hide it. She didn't have anything to do with Lloyd King." Even as he was talking, he was wondering why he was using those words, but when he finished he was convinced that Nora Carroll had not had anything to do with Lloyd King's death.

The phone rang. Vince reached out a long arm, plucked it from the wall shelf over his head, and growled into it. He put his hand over the mouthpiece and looked at Gil.

"It's Tod Hardee and he's over at the hotel," he whispered. "He wants to talk to you. Are you here?"

Tod Hardee, a thin, embittered man, was the marshal for the town of Gasparilla Beach at the northern end of the key.

Gil nodded and took the phone. Vince stood to one side, scowling.

"Gilchrist?" said Hardee. "Come over to the hotel. I want to talk to you."

Gil felt the blood pulse in his face. Hardee's tone was rough and over-bearing.

"What's on your mind?" Gil asked shortly.

"Never mind what's on my mind. You get over here."

Gil snapped, "Go to hell!" and hung up.

"That wasn't very smart, pal," said Vince, pursing his lips. "Now he'll send over a regiment of tough crackers to pick you up."

"Hardee doesn't have any jurisdiction over this end of the key. He has no jurisdiction outside Gasparilla Beach."

"That's fine. Now that you've got it straight in your mind, let's go over and see what he wants. But what are you so sore about? Afraid maybe the dame made a sucker out of you?"

"Nuts to you, and nuts to Hardee!"

Vince took Gil's arm and cajoled him toward the door. "Sure, we can stay here and beat up the deputies," he said persuasively. "And maybe we can beat up the sheriff, too. But what'll happen when the governor sends in the State Guard? I don't want to tangle with those babies. They wear iron hats."

He urged Gil into the jeep parked beside the shack. As they roared up the road, a car came slowly toward them, feeling its way along the bumpy marl. Vince slowed down.

He leaned out of the jeep and called, "Looking for somebody, boys?" and stepped on the gas. He chuckled, watched the other car in the rear vision mirror as it tried frantically to turn in a space that was too narrow.

Marshal Tod Hardee, a lean, sallow man in shirtsleeves and suspenders, was standing on the steps of the hotel when the jeep swooped to a stop before him. He came down the steps, pointing a finger at Gil.

"You're under arrest, Gilchrist!" he shouted.

Gil walked toward him. Big Vince jumped down from the jeep and stood there grinning.

"Got a warrant, Tod?" he asked.

"I don't need a warrant."

"Smack him, Gil," Vince yawned. "Up at this end of the island, he's just another loud-mouth that's asking for it."

"Under arrest for what, Hardee?" asked Gil.

Hardee stopped warily and looked from one to the other. He knew he had spoken too fast and yelled too loudly, but he didn't want to back down.

"All right," he said heavily. "Suppose we forget that part of it for the time being. You acted pretty tough over the phone, Gilchrist."

Vince murmured, "Naughty, naughty," and Hardee whirled on him.

"And you keep out of this, Lenahan," he said furiously.

Gil tipped his head toward the hotel. "Go inside and have a drink, Vince," he said.

Vince grinned and ambled toward the steps. As he passed Gil, he deftly lifted Gil's wallet. "I'm temporarily impoverished," he winked and trotted up the steps.

Gil shook his head. Vince was always temporarily impoverished.

HARDEE waited until Vince had disappeared into the hotel. "Now what's this about your finding Lloyd King's boat?" he said.

Gil told him briefly. Hardee puffed out his cheeks, then released the air with a soft, skeptical plop. He looked thin-eyed into Gil's face for a moment.

"I hear," he said, "that Lloyd was looking for you some three hours before you brought in his boat. The story is, he had fire in his eye. Did he find you?"

"No."

"Any idea why he was looking for you?"

"Could have been about the property Vince and I are cleaning up. He has op-

tion money down on that piece of land."

"He wanted to buy it?"

"That's what option money usually means."

"Why was Lloyd sore at you? Did you tell him the deal was off, or something?"

"I don't know that Lloyd was sore at me," Gil said heatedly. "All I know is that you say he was sore. I haven't seen him all day. And furthermore, once you take a guy's option money, you don't just call a deal off."

"But the deal's off now, ain't it?" Hardee insinuated.

"I don't know. Maybe. Maybe his estate will pick up the option."

It wasn't likely, and Hardee's pale eyes gleamed. "I hear Titus Ogilvie was interested in the property, too."

Gil made a gesture of derision. "That screwball!"

"With his money, he can afford to be a screwball. He *was* interested in the property, wasn't he?"

"He never told me. But every time you dig a hole in this island, he starts babbling about Gasparilla the pirate and buried treasure. He's a nut. Everybody knows that."

"He's a nut," Hardee agreed patiently. "But if he thought there was buried treasure on your place, he'd break his neck to get it. He'd offer you twice what Lloyd King could afford to pay. And everybody knows that, too. He's done it before."

Gil started to laugh, but it withered when he saw the cold gray look in Hardee's eyes. "You're accusing me?" he asked angrily.

"No. Not yet. When I do, you'll know it. And don't think you're outside my jurisdiction, Gilchrist. You're not. The sheriff deputized me to act for him because he's up to his neck in the gambling investigation. And don't count too much on me being a dumb cracker, either!"

He turned away abruptly as the car containing the two deputies he had sent after

Gil, drew up to the hotel. Gil watched him speculatively. No, Hardee wasn't a dumb cracker. He was bitter and he was vindictive, but he was pretty shrewd, too. And nasty.

Hardee waved the two deputies into the hotel. "Frank's in the ping-pong room with the girl," he told them. "Give him a hand. She's a looker, and you know Frank."

One of the deputies laughed. "If she's a looker," he said, "she's gotten around Frank already."

They slouched into the hotel, and Hardee came back to Gil.

"And that reminds me," he said. "How long have you known this Nora Carroll?"

"Another accusation, Hardee?"

"I just wanted to know, that's all.

"I met her for the first time tonight."

"You're from New York, ain't you?"

"So?"

"So's she."

"Look," said Gil disgustedly, "there are more people in Brooklyn alone than there are in the whole state of Florida, and I don't know a single one of them."

"I ain't read the census," said Hardee calmly. "But there ain't but ten guests in the hotel, this being September, and she's the only one from New York. Maybe she's from a different part of New York where you do know more people."

Before Gil could reply, the hotel door crashed open and one of the deputies burst out, yelling wildly, "Tod, she busted Frank over the head and got away!"

CHAPTER TWO

Hideout for a Fugitive

HARDEE swore and plunged into the hotel. Gil followed. As he passed the bar, he glanced in and saw Vince sitting on a stool showing the bar-keep a trick involving a funnel, a dime and a glass of beer, which was going to end

up with the bartender getting a shirtful of beer. Vince pulled that stunt only when he was drunk.

Gil cried to the bartender, "Keep your eye on him, George. He's tricky," and ran into the ping-pong room.

Hardee and the two deputies were clustered around a fourth man, who was sitting dazedly in a chair by the wall. The whole left side of his face was swollen.

Hardee was saying savagely, "But what'd she hit you with? There ain't nothing here."

"How do I know what she hit me with?" Frank mumbled painfully. "I went to get a drink of water from the cooler in the corner and whammo!" He touched his swollen face and winced.

"You made a pass at her," Hardee accused. "She gave you a shove and you fell and hit your face on the ping-pong table."

"I did no such thing!" cried Frank indignantly.

"We found him over by the window, Tod," said one of the other deputies. "He wasn't near the table. Anyways, his face'd be cut if he fell against the table. But she sure hit him with something. Lookit the face on him!"

Hardee snapped, "There wasn't even a spittoon in here. You, Frank, get down to the dock and see that she don't use none of the boats to get off the island. I'll call Walt at the other end and tell him to close the bridge. We'll keep her right here. You, get a boat and cruise around just in case she tries to swim for it. You, come with me."

He strode past Gil at the door and growled, "And I'll see you later, Gilchrist."

Gil walked thoughtfully back to the bar. The bartender was patting his shirtfront with a towel. He was soaked.

"Why'd you have to use beer?" he was saying wryly to Vince. "That stuff stinks."

Vince was wearing a big loose grin of delight. Gil gripped Vince's shoulder.

"Let's go, Vince. Big day tomorrow."

Vince slid obediently from his stool. He winked at the barkeep and said, "Don't hold it against me, George. I'm just a big fun-loving fella. Here's your wallet, Gil. Borrowed twenty. Terrible thing, being broke."

Gil steered him stolidly through the doorway and down the steps. Vince clambered into the jeep and appeared to go to sleep immediately. Gil steered the jeep down the driveway.

"Well, tosspot," he said stiffly, "I hope you're proud of yourself. That was quite a stunt you pulled."

Vince opened one eye. "Aw," he said, "George didn't mind."

"I don't mean that."

"You mean taking your wallet? Hell, Gil. . . ."

"I mean smacking that deputy. What was the idea?"

"Was somebody smacked?" asked Vince innocently. "A deputy? That's against the law."

"I'm serious, Vince. Hardee's no dummy. If I figured it out, he can figure it out. No girl could have hit that deputy as hard as he was hit. His face was up like a balloon. Now what was the idea?"

Vince held his huge knuckly fist to the light of the dashboard. "Skinned my knuckles, too," he grumbled.

"You didn't do that girl any favor, you know."

"Aw, don't get sore at me, Gil. I lost my head."

"Nuts."

"Honest I did, Gil. I went outside for a minute and happened to pass the open window of the ping-pong room, and there was that ugly little runt in there trying to proposition the chick, telling her he could make it easy for her with Hardee. Hell, Gil, I'm chivalrous. So I leaned in the window and smacked him."

"You just wanted to raise a little hell."

Vince looked at him slyly. "Hardee was sore, wasn't he?"

Gil swore. "Dammit, Vince, know what you've done? You've got that girl in trouble. Hardee'll give her a tough time when he picks her up now."

Vince said uneasily, "She didn't have to run, did she?"

"With the law propositioning her, what did you expect her to do?"

"I'm sorry, Gil. I only did it to give Hardee a hot-foot."

"That's fine. That's great. That's all he'll need. He's got half a notion already that I killed Lloyd."

"You're kidding."

"Am I?"

Gil told him how the marshal had tried to tie in Titus Ogilvie's interest in the lake with the death of Lloyd King, Vince forked his fingers through his harsh red hair.

"Maybe Ogilvie knocked Lloyd off," he said hopefully. "Lloyd held the option. The property was really out of our hands. And there's another angle, too. Sometimes Lloyd was a little too sharp, like the time he sold Major Kauff that trailer court on Monasota Road just before the new highway made it a dead end stuck out in the middle of nowhere. That Major's a hot-headed cracker. And that's not the only fancy deal Lloyd ever pulled, either."

Gil said dryly, "Okay, let's whistle while we pass the cemetery."

Vince said, "Aaaaaah," and lapsed into sulky silence.

Gil parked the jeep beside the shack and strode toward the door while Vince hung back, muttering something about seeing a man. Gil stopped short on the threshold, his jaw sagging—for there, wrapped in a blanket and reading a magazine, sat Nora Carroll.

SHE started and looked up as the door opened. "Hello, Shirttail," she said shakily.

He closed the door and stood staring at her. She tried to look back jauntily, but her perkiness was gone and she was scared

clean through. Gil looked back over his shoulder.

"Vince sent you here?"

She flushed. She stood and threw the blanket on Vince's cot behind her. "I was just resting," she said coldly. "I only dropped in for a moment to say hello, and now that I've said it . . ."

"Sit down. What do you want to do, go out and get yourself pawed by Hardee's eager beavers? And put on your blanket. No wonder Frank made a pass at you. *And stop calling me Shirttail!*"

"I'm sorry," she said meekly. She was close to tears. She picked up the blanket and hurriedly pulled it over her scanty swim suit.

Gil opened the door and yelled out into the night. "You can come in now. It's all over."

Vince sidled sheepishly into the room. "I'm glad you're not sore, Gil, but what could I do? There she was with no place to go and no clothes on, so I told her to come over here and maybe we could find her a pair of pants."

"I did so have clothes on," said Nora indignantly.

"Well, hardly any to speak of. You looked chilly."

Gil groaned and sat down on the edge of his cot, eyeing the two of them. "If I didn't know Hardee so well," he said to Nora, "I'd make you give yourself up. But right now he's sore, and when he's sore he's mean, and I wouldn't wish that on anybody. You didn't kill Lloyd, did you?"

"Oh, no! I—I hardly knew him."

"She means," said Vince, "she wouldn't bump off anybody but a friend." He laughed.

Gil said wearily, "Funny man."

Vince picked up his scotch bottle from the floor and took down three glasses from the hanging shelves over the small gas range.

"What we need," he said, "is a drink."

"What we need," said Gil, "is to figure

out what in hell we're going to do about Nora."

"We could give her some clothes to start with. She looks like a squaw in that blanket; and I'll bet it itches, too."

Nora gave him a grateful glance and said to Gil, "I—I'm sorry I got you into this, Gil."

He smiled at her and went to the chest of drawers for a pair of cotton slacks and a faded plaid shirt that were too small for him.

"You didn't get me into anything. It's all in Hardee's mind. Here, try these. They might actually fit."

She took the clothes he offered her. "I didn't mean to get you in trouble," she said in a muffled voice.

"She's going to keep that up," murmured Vince, "until there isn't a dry eye in the house."

"But I—I lied to you."

THE silence in the small room became suddenly very dense. Vince stood there with the scotch bottle dangling from his hand, staring at her. Gil gripped the edge of the cot on either side of him and leaned forward.

"Lied about what, Nora?" he said.

"About . . . finding Lloyd King's boat. It wasn't drifting in the Gulf. It was pulled up on the sand. I knew it was his. I'd seen it tied up at the hotel dock, and I'd seen him use it. If you were a female, you'd have done just what I did. I was still furious because he'd been so sure I'd let him neck with me. I had a notion that he was up in the dunes with a girl, so I thought I'd make him look foolish. I took his boat. I pushed it out into the water and towed it along until I came to the pass into the bay, then I paddled it in. And all the while I was laughing to myself, thinking how mad he was going to be. It's a long, mosquito-y walk from the beach to the hotel. The tide hadn't started to go out, and it was easy paddling until I got

into the bay, but when the tide did start to move, the boat started to move out with it. I paddled until the paddle broke, and then I tried to start the boat, but it wouldn't start. That's when I yelled to you."

Gil grunted as if she had struck him heavily in the body.

"It's the truth, Gil!" she cried, mistaking his expression.

He shook his head. "I believe you, but I was thinking of something else. Hardee's going to find the marks in the sand where the boat was pulled up, and he's going to find your footprints around it. Wait a minute!" He sat up, his eyes gleaming. "He'll find Lloyd's footprints and those of the girl who was with him. You say they pointed into the dunes?"

Nora looked unhappily at him. "I didn't say I saw them at all," she said in a small voice.

"But you—"

"I only said I had a notion he was in the dunes with a girl, just basing it on past experience. I . . . didn't notice any footprints. They may have been there, but I wasn't looking for them."

"They were probably there, all right. Lloyd wouldn't pull up his boat on the beach just to go for a walk in the dunes all by himself."

"Sure," said Vince. "And Hardee's no duddy. He'll find the footprints in the sand, he'll see that there was a second dame, and all he'll have to do is find out who Lloyd had a date with, and that'll be that. Let's have a drink and forget it. There's nothing to worry about."

"He's right," Gil smiled at the girl. "Have a drink."

"I—I'd like to put these clothes on first." She looked around. There was only this one room. There was no place to dress. She seemed suddenly shy about the scantiness of the swim suit in the nearness of the little room.

"I'll be back in a minute," she said, and went outside, trailing the blanket.

VINCE took a long pull at the bottle and eyed the closed door with a troubled expression. He glanced at Gil and shook his head.

"What do you think, pal?" he asked finally.

Gil looked surprised. "She's telling the truth, of course."

"Sure, sure. But she already told Hardee she found the boat *drifting* in the Gulf. He's going to know different the minute he sees the marks in the sand, and he'll figure if she lied about that, she lied about everything."

"Do you think she's lying, Vince?"

"Me? I never think, pal. I'm just a rummy. Why should I think when I can always have a drink instead? But here's what the radio said. The Coast Guard found Lloyd with the back of his head split open. That means he was hit with something heavy. Right?"

"Right, but what are you driving at?"

"Damn if I know," Vince pulled his big hand down his face as if to clear his mind. "I can see a dame hitting a guy in the puss if he made a pass at her, but I can't see Nora hitting him on the back of the head, because that'd mean she wanted to kill him. A poke in the snoot, yes, but the back of the head, no. But what are we going to do with her, pal? We can't keep her here. Hardee'll be paying us a visit soon, or I don't know what I'm talking about."

"We can't kick her out," said Gil sharply.

"I didn't mean that, pal. We got to hide her out some place. For tonight, anyway. Maybe tomorrow we can figure a way to get her off the island, but tonight Hardee's got the lid clamped tight."

Gil grinned. "I'm way ahead of you." He pointed at the ceiling.

Vince looked up and said, "Huh?"

"The roof, stupid, the roof. Behind the sign. It runs clear across the roof and faces the road, and you'd have to be out on the lake to see her from the back. It's three

feet high. We could even hide you behind it."

Vince tilted the bottle again and grinned, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. He filled the three glasses on the table.

When Nora walked back into the room, hung with Gil's slacks and shirt, he cried gaily, "We found an apartment for you, honeybun. In the penthouse. Let's have our drink."

Without waiting for them to take their glasses, he downed his drink at a gulp and poured another. He saw Nora watching him and he winked at her.

"I don't always drink like this," he grinned. "Most of the time I play poker."

"And loses his shirt," said Gil.

"My shirt! Pal, that session last Saturday night in Sarasota cost me my next five years' wardrobe. What a lousy run of luck that was," he said gloomily. He laughed his old happy laugh. "But what the hell, it's only money."

A little of the liquor splashed on his chin this time when he tossed off his drink, and he lurched a little as he reached for the bottle again. Gil stopped him.

"Come on, Vince," he said. "We've got to furnish Nora's penthouse."

"Oh, sure, sure. Less go."

Gil wouldn't let him climb the ladder to the roof, though Vince did seem steadier in the open air. Gil went up and Vince tossed him the blankets, pillow and mosquito netting. It made a passable bed. Nora smiled when she climbed the ladder and saw it.

"I'll tuck you in," Gil said.

"That has a kind of familiar ring, Mr. Gilchrist."

"I mean, I'll tuck the mosquito netting around you to keep the bugs out."

She laughed. "I know." Then impulsively, "I'm sorry I was so wise-cracking with you tonight, Gil. I— I just had one of my hates on, I guess."

"One of your what?"

"One of my hates. I'm an entertainer,

Gil. I work in a night club on 54th Street in New York, and sometimes I wish God had made men without hands. I was taking it out on you, and I'm sorry." She touched his arm, then leaned toward him and kissed him swiftly, lightly on the cheek. "Now you can tuck me in."

He tucked the netting around her, leaned over her for a moment. "There won't be any men tonight," he said. "Only mosquitoes, and I'm told that even there only the female bites. The male mosquito stays at home with his feet up on the radiator, listening to the radio and waiting for mama to come back from the blood bank."

Nora giggled. "Just like a man."

"But listen," he said seriously, "inside we can hear every noise you make up here, so if anyone comes, for the luvva mud, don't move around. See you in the morning."

CHAPTER THREE

Boomerang

GIL climbed down, then shouldered the ladder and hid it among the mangrove and sea grape fifty feet from the shack. When he went back into the room, Vince was sitting on the edge of his cot, cleaning his shotgun.

Gil said sharply, "What's that for?"

"Psychology," said Vince promptly. "I'm just going to stand it near-by so Har-dee can't miss seeing it when he walks in. There's nothing quite as psychological as the sight of a loaded shotgun to soothe the savage breast."

"Don't be a fool."

"Nossir. I just remember a lesson I got in Tampa. I was playing poker with three Cubans and a Dutchman, and the Dutchman accused one of the little Spanish brothers of tinkering with the deal. The little Cuban didn't say a word. He just laid his knife on the table, a little knife no bigger than this, and that Dutchman was the po-

litest guy you'd ever want to meet for the rest of the night. Lost five hundred myself."

Gil growled and snatched the gun away. Vince started up angrily, then settled back slowly on the cot. His eyelids drooped over his eyes and, lowering his head, he looked up at Gil from under his lashes.

"Sometimes, pal," he rumbled, "you try a man's temper."

"You're soused, Vince. Wouldn't it be just dandy if you started waving your gun under Hardee's nose and it went off!"

"I'll break his neck if he comes yapping in here."

"Say, what's the matter with you, anyway? Hardee's my worry, not yours. You've slapped down his deputy, you grabbed the girl from under his nose, and now you want to work on him. Why? What's the angle?"

Vince wrinkled his lips. "I don't like him."

Gil crossed the room and hung the shotgun on the wall pegs near the door. He turned. "Why not?" he asked. "Hardee never did anything to you."

"Didn't he? Then why's he go around all the time saying we're a couple of damyankee shysters? According to him, our fixing up this lake was just another Yankee trick. Don't tell me you didn't hear about that."

"Sure, but why get yourself all hot and bothered? It's envy, that's all. He wishes he had it. His family used to own all this property around here."

"And sold it for three cents an acre to buy themselves corn likker. I know he's jealous, but I don't have to like him, do I?"

"No, but you don't have to poke him in the snoot either."

A beam of dazzling light slashed across the windows as a car turned in the marl road outside and stopped to the right of the shack.

"Here comes company," drawled Vince.

Gil turned on him. "Now behave yourself," he warned.

Vince shrugged, rolled over on his cot and lay back, clasping his hands behind his head. Gil glanced once at the ceiling and felt his heart beat a little faster. He moistened his lips and jerked when the knock came on the door.

But it wasn't Hardee. It was a short, plump man with a foxy face.

"Came the minute I heard Lloyd King was dead," he cried in a bright, chattering voice. "Didn't want anybody to get ahead of me this time."

Gil stared. The man peered brightly at him.

"Ogilvie's the name," he said. "Titus Ogilvie, the eccentric millionaire." He tittered. "But that's what they say about all millionaires, isn't it? It's eccentric to have money these days, I suppose. May I come in?"

OGILVIE darted into the room and gave it a quick, bright-eyed glance. "Lay my cards right on the table. You're Gilchrist, aren't you? Right. I want to buy your tract. What's your price?"

Gil slowly closed the door, appraising the man. "We've roughed this out for a real estate development, Mr. Ogilvie. I didn't know you were in that business."

"What difference does that make? Do you subject all prospective buyers to a cross examination? What's your price? You didn't do all this work for fun, did you? You have a price, don't you? All right. What is it?"

"I just wondered why you wanted this property, that's all."

"Oh no, Mr. Gilchrist. You're not wondering at all. If you didn't know my reputation for being a damn fool about buried treasure, then you're just about the only one hereabouts who doesn't. But be that as it may, I'm asking you to name a price."

Gil walked slowly to the table and picked

up the scotch bottle, looked at it for a moment, then filled two of the glasses.

"Hey, me too," protested Vince from the cot.

Gil filled the third glass, handed a drink to Vince and gave one to Ogilvie.

"It's the buried treasure angle I want to hear about," he said. "Especially why it brings you here," he glanced at the alarm clock on the shelf over the gas range, "after midnight."

"Buried treasure," Ogilvie's eyes gleamed at Gil over the rim of his glass, "happens to be my hobby, Mr. Gilchrist. I don't expect to make a fortune at it. I've got a fortune. It's my hobby. Does that answer your question?"

Gil said flatly, "No."

Ogilvie gave him a pitying smile. "I can see that you don't have a hobby. It's the excitement. Why do men go elephant hunting? Because they like elephant meat? The excitement, Mr. Gilchrist, the excitement. Even stamp collecting has its brand of excitement. My brand happens to be buried treasure."

Gil said shortly, "I'm sorry, Mr. Ogilvie, but there's no buried treasure on this property."

"No?" Ogilvie chuckled, dug into his pocket and tossed four coins on the table. "What do you think of that?"

Gil gave him a sharp glance and picked up one of the coins.

"That, Mr. Gilchrist," said Ogilvie smugly, "is a Spanish doubloon. The smaller ones are old Dutch coins. They were brought to me by one of the men you employed to put in your marl road. He found them in the muck dug up when you opened the channel from your lake to the bay with the steamshovel."

Vince was sitting up on the edge of the cot, stretching his neck to see the coins on the table. Gil looked at him and raised his eyebrows.

"Could be, Gil," he said. "The men were always swarming over the junk I

pulled up with the shovel. They were after Indian relics they could sell to the museum."

Gil looked at the coin in his hand. "It's pretty shiny."

"Naturally," said Ogilvie. "He polished it to see what he had found. Now, if you'll name your price for this tract, we can settle everything here and now."

Gil tossed the coin back on the table. "I'm sorry Mr. Ogilvie," he said shortly, "but I can't sell to you."

Ogilvie looked stupified, and then his face clotted. Vince said hoarsely, "Gil, for the luvva . . ."

"I can't sell," said Gil evenly, "because Lloyd King's option hasn't run out and his estate may take it up."

Ogilvie cried shrilly, "Nonsense!"

"Nonsense or not, that's the way it is."

Ogilvie's hands twitched. "I don't mind having to pay through the nose, Gilchrist. I expect that." His voice rose stridently. "But I won't be balked. This is the first time in twenty years I've seen such positive evidence of pirate treasure, and I won't be balked. You understand? I won't be balked!"

Gil's answer was a shake of his head.

Ogilvie yelled, "I know what you're thinking. You're thinking to drain your lake and try to find the treasure for yourself. You fool! You won't find enough to pay for your labor. I know. I've been hunting treasure for twenty years. For the excitement. Listen to me, you fool . . ."

He clawed Gil's shirt. Gil pushed him off, but Ogilvie caught his shirtfront again, pleading to be heard.

A voice cut in, "What's going on here?" and Hardee walked in.

Gil said dryly, "Mr. Ogilvie got over-enthusiastic."

Ogilvie pointed a quivering finger at Hardee. "You told me—"

"Go home, Mr. Ogilvie," Hardee interrupted quickly. "You got yourself all upset."

Ogilvie glowered, then gave his lapels a vicious jerk, settling his jacket, and stalked toward the door. He turned, gave Gil a look of blazing hatred, and walked out, slamming the door. Gil paid no attention to him. His eyes were watchfully on Hardee. The marshal walked over to the table, looked down at the coins. He looked at Gil.

"Funny thing," he said casually. "We found a mess of these coins in Lloyd King's room at the hotel. Pirate money. Looks like Lloyd was playing a trick on old Ogilvie."

Gil's eyes did not leave the marshal's lean, sallow face. Hardee was being too smooth, too off-hand.

"Of course," the marshal went on in the same careless tone, "I ain't gonna ask where Lloyd got the pirate money we found in his room. But this should interest you, Gilchrist. We found the place on the beach where Lloyd's boat was pulled up. We even took the boat over and matched it to the marks. The girl's footprints were all around it. Her prints disappeared straight into the water, and guess where I picked them up—in the soft marl of your road outside, leading straight to this shack. Interested, Gilchrist?"

The muscles bunched at the hinges of Gil's jaws, but still he said nothing. His face felt frozen. Hardee raised his eyebrows.

"Not interested?" he said in mock surprise. "Maybe we can find something that will interest you. The Coast Guard took Lloyd's body into Bradenton, and I just got the medical report. Lloyd was smacked on the jaw—hard—before his head was split open. It was the boat that split his head open when he was knocked down. Blood all over the back of it. . . ."

Vince cried out and started up from his cot. Hardee whirled on him, snatching at the gun in his waistband.

"Don't swing on me, Lenahan," he said dangerously.

Gil made a sharp gesture with his hand. "Sit down, Vince. What is on your mind, Hardee? This has been just talk so far."

Hardee smiled secretly, like a mink, behind his narrow eyes. "You know, Gilchrist, you're a newcomer here on the key. The Hardees have been in Florida since the Indians. There's always been Hardees in Florida. My grandpa used to own this whole damn key. He was tricked out of it by a Yankee."

Vince was about to growl an answer to that, but Gil silenced him with another sharp chop of his hand and said to Hardee, "Come to the point!"

Hardee's eyes sprang wide for a moment. Gil's voice was laden with menace, with leashed temper. The marshal cocked his head arrogantly.

"I'm tired of being marshal. You own a three-mile strip of this island and it's mighty valuable, but it won't help you a bit if you're in jail. My folks used to own everything hereabouts. Make me a suggestion."

He leaned toward Gil and showed a faint line of teeth. Vince moved and the marshal turned sharply, flipping up his gun. Gil kicked it out of his hand. Hardee cried out and scrambled backward. Vince sprang at him, tripped over his blanket and sprawled headlong, the change and contents of his pockets spilling out over the floor. Gil lunged at Hardee, hit him twice in the face, grabbed him by the belt and the collar and heaved him out of the shack. He slammed the door and leaned back against it, breathing heavily.

Vince dizzily raised himself to his hands and knees. Between him and Gil was the change that had spilled out of his pockets—and in the midst of it lay a gleaming gold coin, a Spanish doubloon, a match to Ogilvie's coin on the table. Vince's jaw went slack. He lunged wildly and snatched it up, concealing it in his big hands.

"Why'd you kill Lloyd, Vince?" Gil asked dully.

Vince stood clumsily. He rubbed his hand across his face and avoided looking at Gil. His liquor-sodden brain was confused. His eyes lurched around the room and found the scotch bottle, his friend the scotch bottle. He snatched it from the table and took a deep swallow. He slid a glance at Gil.

"Me kill Lloyd?" he said thickly. "You're kidding, Gil."

"I had an idea it might have been you when Ogilvie showed those coins," Gil said in the same dull voice. "It looked like your kind of joke. And when Hardee said Lloyd had been smacked on the chin . . ."

Vince cried out, "Aw, Gil!" and it was a cry of distress.

"It started as a joke?" Gil said gently.

VINCE tossed his hands and gave a dumb nod. The tears were running down his face now.

"It was just for the laughs, Gil," he said brokenly. "Honest. I couldn't stand Lloyd. Wolf. And Ogilvie was a crackpot. Joke. Know what I mean, Gil? Just for the laughs. I used to collect old coins when I was a kid and had a shoebox full of them. So I sent one of the boys over to Ogilvie with some, and the same boy over to Lloyd with some more. The idea was to get Ogilvie excited enough to make Lloyd get steamed up with an offer. Then I was going to lift the lid and laugh at both of them. You see, Gil? Just a joke. Then I got in that hole with that poker session. I needed dough. So I went to Lloyd and laid it on the line. Either he gave me two thousand bucks, or I told Ogilvie the whole thing was a phony. The buried treasure gag. Ogilvie must have made him some kind of

offer, because Lloyd gave me the two grand with hardly a yap."

"And you lost those two grand in another poker game, Vince?"

"And more, pal, and more," Vince groaned. "I went to Lloyd for another two grand. He turned me down. I told him I'd spill to Ogilvie, and anyway, I said to him, there was a joker in his option and we could bust it any time we wanted, and maybe *we'd* sell to Ogilvie ourselves. That's what made him sore, and he set out looking for you. That was tonight."

He raised the scotch bottle and tipped recklessly. He looked at Gil.

"Hell, Gil," he said, "I couldn't let him get to you and let you know what a louse I was. I didn't want *you* to know, Gil. Hell, you're my pal. Anyway, he found out you were fishing in the bay, so he started for his boat. I went after him, saying let's talk this over. He was willing. We went out in his boat and we talked. I said let's drop the whole thing, and he wanted his two grand back, and I said I'd spill to Ogilvie about the phony coins and one thing led to another. I'd been drinking a lot before that. He swung and smacked me, and I smacked him back, but I wasn't very steady and I fell overboard. The last thing I saw of his boat, it was heading straight out into the Gulf under full throttle. I thought he was in it. I didn't know I'd killed the guy. It was only a little smack on the jaw. Otherwise, honest, Gil, I wouldn't have let Hardee get you and Nora into that mess. Lloyd must have hit his head on the side of the boat and gone overboard the same time I did, but I didn't know it. And the boat must have circled

(Continued on page 110)

HIS WORD WAS HIS BOND

◆ A Cleveland man, thrown out of a bar, kept his promise that he would come back and "wreck the joint." A few hours later he backed his truck through the front of the tavern, smashing a plate-glass window, caving in wooden and steel supports, and damaging five bar stools and part of the bar. ◆

GHOUL TO GO!

By FLETCHER FLORA



I turned to find Al Braun standing there. . . .

◆ *Luscious Mandy didn't ask much—just that I bring back her big pigskin hero from the fix-boys' deadly free-for-all!* ◆

I HAD gone to bed early with a migraine, and was still awake when the door bell began to ring. I tried to ignore it, but it kept on ringing in long bursts, and after a while I fumbled my way out through the dark living room and jerked the door open. It was Mandy standing out there in the hall. She looked agitated as she brushed past me into the room.

"What a break to find you in, Turner!"

I struggled to think clearly through the throbbing pain in my head. In my heart,

too. Mandy did that. When I looked at Mandy, I usually quit thinking.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"It's Clay, Turner. He's gone."

Clay DeGrange. You've seen him on the sports page. Crisp blond hair over a nice smile. Six-two. Broad shoulders, flat belly, slender hips. He looks swell in a uniform. Pigskin hero. The highest paid pro in the game.

I lifted an eyebrow.

"Gone? Where?"

"If I knew, I wouldn't be here. He dropped out of sight last night. He was seen about nine o'clock in the Club Flush. Not since."

The pain in my head was no worse. The one in my heart was. Mandy looking for Clay. Never for Turner.

"Keep looking in the bars," I said. "He's probably on a binge."

Mandy shook her head.

"Not Clay. He wouldn't go on a binge just before tomorrow's big game with the Badgers. He thinks too much of that fat contract he's got with Clancy Morgan."

Right enough. Clancy Morgan wasn't a guy to fool around with. He was a solid block of a man with a big bald dome and enough hair in his eyebrows to make a toupe for it. Coach of the Bay City Trojans. His experience went back to the flying wedge, and he could smell a good pro from here to the Rose Bowl. He could smell the campus flashes, too, the bright boys who didn't have it for the big grind. A tough guy to play fancy with.

"How about the hospitals?" I asked.

"We've tried them all. Nothing doing."

"Why not go to the police?"

"Be your age, Turner. You know Clancy can't turn the cops loose on this without knowing what's underneath. If there's a stink, he'll want to cover it."

"Sure," I said, "sure. So you want someone else to find your gladiator for you. You picked the wrong guy, honey. I'm just Turner Jones, an ex-reporter turned copywriter. I'm no bloodhound."

"Please, Turner. We've got to have Clay for that game tomorrow."

"Maybe the Trojans can win without him."

"Clancy says no. Clancy says they haven't got a prayer."

I stood up and tried to look like a man getting bored.

"Look, honey. I've got a migraine. My head's about to blow up. Clay's a big boy now. He'll find his own way home."

For a minute she didn't say anything. She just stood there looking beautiful and making me feel like a heel. Amanda Thorne. The girl you always saw with Clay DeGrange when he was going somewhere that counted. To the places where the cameras hung around. She had brown hair in a long bob and a face you wanted to take home and a body that gave you ideas. A shining, sleek, nylon lovely. The hero's prize. The big shot's baby.

"Okay," she said. "Go to bed and nurse your damned migraine. I'll look for him alone."

So I was whipped. I'd just put up a struggle for pride's sake, anyhow.

"Sit down," I said. "Be with you in a minute."

I WENT back into the bedroom and turned on a light. My right eye felt as if it were going to pop out of its socket. I closed it and looked for my clothes with the left. When I was dressed, I swallowed half a dozen aspirin tablets, washing them down with a glass of tepid water. Not that I expected them to do any good. It just seemed like something I ought to do. Back in the living room, I got Mandy and took her downstairs and outside to my old Plymouth at the curb.

Clay DeGrange had been seen last in Felix Cato's hot spot, cutely called the Club Flush. It seemed like it might be smart to start with Felix. I drove that way.

In a small bar outside the main room of the club, we crawled onto stools, and I mentioned rye to the bartender.

"Felix around?" I asked.

"He might be around for the right people."

I found a fin and admired Lincoln's picture.

"Would you be willing to ask him if he's here?"

The bartender thought it over for a split second and stretched. Somehow his fingers got tangled up in the fin.

"No harm in asking," he said.

"Tell him it's Turner Jones looking for a stray fullback."

He went out through a door at the rear end of the bar. We nursed rye and waited. Pretty soon he came back and jerked his head, and we got off our stools and walked back through the door into a short, narrow hall that headed for the alley behind the club. There was a closed door down the hall about ten feet. I used my knuckles on it and got an invitation to come in.

The guy standing in the middle of the room looking at us was short and plump, with a fat, round face and a small mouth that was curved in a false-looking smile. His hair was black and oiled away from a sharp part that looked as if it had been surveyed. There wasn't anything in his eyes to make us feel welcome.

The door shut behind us with a soft click, and Felix Cato drifted around to a chair behind a desk.

"Come on in. Find chairs and sit."

We found chairs and used them. Behind the desk, Cato came up with a bottle and glasses.

"Drink? This is better than the stuff you had outside."

"No, thanks. We've learned to like the cheap stuff."

"Have it your own way." He shoved the bottle out of sight without pouring. "You mentioned a fullback. What's the pitch?"

"There isn't any pitch. There isn't even any fullback."

Black, unblinking eyes warned me that I'd better have more in mind than a corny joke.

"Gone?"

"That's right."

"DeGrange?"

"Right again."

"Where?"

"I thought maybe you could answer that one."

"Nix, brother. If you've got me figured

for fancy work, you couldn't be making a bigger mistake. I want DeGrange in that brawl tomorrow. I want him in there bad."

"Why? Home town loyalty?"

If he saw the humor, he didn't recognize it.

"Yeah," he said. "Ten thousand skins worth of loyalty. Look, fellow, I've got money on this game. On the Trojans to win. Maybe I laid it too soon. Something's been happening. Take the odds. They've gone down. It's close to even money now. Why? If it were generally known that DeGrange is gone, that would explain it. But it isn't known. So there's another explanation. Maybe it's because someone laid too much on the Badgers. I'd like to know who it was. To me, it figures that the same guy who made the bet also knows that DeGrange is out of the picture. There's a tie-up. A nice, nasty tie-up. And I don't like the idea of losing ten grand because someone's done some fancy work."

He was convincing. Even a guy with a migraine handicap could see that he was laying it on the line.

"You figure it for a snatch?" I asked.

He shrugged and gave me a thin smile that didn't mean he was amused.

"This is a football town. The bookies do a big business when the Trojans play. I can think of a couple of guys who might make a snatch to insure a bet."

"Name one."

He shook his head and repeated the thin smile.

"You're not working for me. Why should I help you?" I'll give you a hint, though. You know the Tripoli? There's a red-headed canary named Sherry Allen who carries the torches. Clay DeGrange knows her. Real well. If you want to dig, try it there. Around here, you're wasting your time. And if you find Clay DeGrange, tell him I want him in that game real bad. Ten grand bad."

We said thanks and left. In the Plymouth, we headed for the Tripoli. Mandy

lit a cigarette and sat stiffly in a corner.

"Don't blame me," I said. "I can't help what you hear."

She laughed. The sound was brittle enough to break into small pieces.

"So Clay's a louse. Is that news? Trouble is, he's such a beautiful louse."

"Sure," I said. "All those muscles."

THE Tripoli was a so-so joint that liked a stiff shirt but didn't make an issue of it. I got a table and ordered drinks that weren't worth the money but came in pretty glasses. We played with them and hung on. A small orchestra was making musical shivers with mutes and strings and stuff. A few couples moved around the dance floor. I saw Al Braun cross a corner of the room and disappear through a door near the orchestra. Al was owner of the joint. He had other interests, too. Mainly gambling. I watched his thin back out of sight and wondered whether he liked the Trojans or the Badgers in tomorrow's brawl. I was still wondering when the lights went out and Sherry Allen showed up in a spot.

She was a looker, all right. Her hair was that deep, dark shade of red, full of lights and shadows, that's called red only because there's no word to fit it. Somewhere below the shoulders, a dark green gown got started almost too late to accomplish the mission that gowns are supposed to accomplish. I tried to figure out how she got into the thing and finally decided she must have put it on with a brush. I guess she could sing, too. Not that it mattered.

When she was gone and the lights went up, I pushed my eyes back into their sockets and sent Mandy to the powder room.

"This is work for the solitary male," I said.

She dropped me a wink that wouldn't pass the censor and drifted away. I watched her go, wishing she'd shown a little reluctance, and fingered a waiter over.

"Will you ask Miss Allen to come to my table for a few minutes?"

The waiter gave me an icy eye that said a fig for naughty boys, and informed me that Miss Allen did not visit the tables of gentlemen. He said the word gentlemen as if it were a dirty joke.

I sighed and found another fin.

"This isn't routine, Jack. This is business that Miss Allen won't want to miss. Tell her it's Turner Jones with a fullback on his mind."

Persuaded, he and Lincoln went off together toward the door behind the orchestra. In a couple of minutes they were back.

"Miss Allen says you can come to her room. First door on the right."

I got up and followed directions. A light tap on the door brought a throaty invitation to enter. She was alone in the room, sitting on the arm of a chair, wearing a lacey black robe instead of the green gown she'd worn under the spot. I found nothing to complain about in the change of costume.

"You're Turner Jones?" She said. "I don't know you."

The voice remained throaty, but there was an edge on it. I noticed, too, that she had glamour eyes. Like emeralds. Green and hard. Especially hard.

"My tough luck," I said.

She moved to a dressing table and found a cigarette. Lighting it, she said, "What's about the fullback?"

"I've lost one. Someone told me you had him on a string."

"Maybe the string broke."

"Maybe. I'm just looking around."

"Hasn't anyone ever told you that looking around isn't nice?"

"Sorry. I never had any training. How long since you've seen Clay DeGrange?"

"Two nights ago, maybe. Maybe three. I didn't make a note of it."

"He due tonight?"

"He didn't mention it."

"Too bad. I'd like to see him."

"See him tomorrow. Or can't you afford a ticket to the game?"

"Come off, baby. If I don't find him, there isn't going to be any game. Not for Clay DeGrange."

"You're crazy!"

I shrugged that one off and was about to try a new angle when I noticed that she was looking over my shoulder at the door. I turned to find Al Braun standing there, watching us. He looked at me without any expression at all on his thin, dark face.

"Hello, Turner. Working or playing?"

Evidently he thought I was still a news-hound, and I didn't tell him otherwise. I said, "Working. I never have any fun."

"No? It shouldn't be like that. Take my advice, Turner. Quit working and start playing. It'll add years to your life."

"Thanks. I'll have to try it. Just as soon as I finish the job I'm on."

"Maybe you ought to start right now. Before you finish the job."

"I don't think finishing this one will kill me."

"You never can tell, Turner. Better think it over."

His thin mouth stretched in a faint smile, and he lowered an eyelid in the direction of Sherry. Turning, he slopped away. I could see that the canary was enjoying the joke.

"Okay," I said. "Thanks, baby, for nothing."

"What did you expect? You paid nothing."

"You didn't name a price."

"What's the use? You haven't got it."

"That's what I thought," I said.

BACK in the main room, I skirted the edge and eased through a door on the side. From there, narrow stairs went up to the game rooms. A few people were losing money, but it was too early for heavy business. I wandered around, looking for a guy I knew. I found him behind a black-jack table with an idle deck of cards lying

in front of him. His name was Jimmy Parkhurst. Once in my newspaper days I'd saved him from a bit of publicity that would have made him unpopular in quarters where it didn't pay to lose popularity. I thought he probably hadn't forgotten it. Seeing me, he grinned.

"Hi, Turner. How about a game?"

"Do I look like a sucker?"

"Nix, pal. It won't be that way. I'll let you win a few bucks."

I shook my head. "Thanks. If you want to do a favor, there's another way."

"Something special?"

"Yeah. Information."

"Sit down, pal."

I sat, and he began to deal a phony game.

"What's on your mind?"

"You know Clay DeGrange?"

"The pro back? Sure."

"He come here often?"

"Sure. Real often."

"How about him and the canary downstairs?"

He held up two fingers close together.

"That's what I've heard," I said. "He play the games?"

"Sure. Craps mostly."

"Maybe he's lucky at craps."

"Not him. He's way behind the game."

"Oh, well. With what the Trojans pay him, he can afford to drop some."

"He can't afford to drop this kind of dough. Al Braun's holding a big bundle of his paper."

"Yeah? How big?"

"I don't keep Al's books. Plenty, though."

I puckered for a whistle and began to get an idea. "Al bet on football?"

Jimmy shrugged and flipped an ace off the deck. "Al bets on anything that'll get him a buck. That includes football."

"He have anything in tomorrow's books?"

"I wouldn't know."

"Who's his bookie?"

"Morey Stebbins. He fronts with a book and magazine shop down on Fifth Street. Lives upstairs. It's a dump."

Standing, I said, "I know the place. One other thing. Where's the canary's nest?"

"The Winchester Towers."

"Good. Thanks, Jimmy."

"Forget it, pal. I owed it."

I collected Mandy in the main room. It wasn't far to Fifth Street. In fifteen minutes, I was parking the car a block from Morey Stebbins' shop.

"You wait here, baby," I said, and went down the street swiftly in the deep shadows of the old buildings.

Morey's shop was dark, downstairs and up. At one side of the building a door opened onto a rickety stairway. I tried the door and found it unlocked. No light was burning in the hall above. I tried to be quiet going up, but each step protested loudly under my feet.

At the head of the stairs, I saw a door opening off the hall to my left. Stepping over, I discovered that the door was open a crack. I put an eye to the crack and saw weak light from the street lamp outside spilling in over the floor. I saw something else, too. A pair of legs sprawled in the light. Putting fingers to the door, I widened the crack and slipped in.

Morey Stebbins was a nasty mess. He'd been given a treatment a young guy shouldn't get, let alone a guy as old as Morey. His face was swollen out of shape from a grade-A beating, and blood from cuts above his eyes and on his cheek bones had streaked his face and was beginning to dry. His thin gray hair was matted with the stuff. I went over and touched him. Warm. He was still alive but not very.

Squatting on my heels beside the old bookie, I did some thinking, and it didn't take much of a brain to reach the conclusion that Felix Cato's boys had gotten here ahead of me.

I should have been thinking of the guys who came after me. Al Braun and one of

his hoods. The first moment I was aware of them was when Al spoke. I must have been pretty far away to miss those creaking stairs.

"Shame on you, snoop. Beating hell out of an old crumb like Morey."

Cursing myself, I stood and turned.

"Not me, Al. I just walked in on the results."

His thin mouth was set in that smile that didn't mean what smiles are supposed to mean. Behind him, the hood stood with one hand in his coat pocket, waiting.

"Yeah? I won't bother to find out, snoop. I told you to quit working. Too bad you wouldn't take the advice."

He stepped aside and jerked his head at the hood behind him.

"Okay, Ricco. Take him."

THE hood's hand started to come out of his pocket. There didn't seem to be anywhere to go, but I thought I ought to try. I hit the floor in a roll that carried me out of the light. As I rolled, three soft splats sounded from the vicinity of the door. But no lead tore into my body. None ripped into the floor near me. Coming to my knees, I looked for Al and Ricco.

Al was stretched on the floor. Dead. It only takes a glance to tell, when the top of a guy's head is mostly missing. Ricco was leaning against the door jamb, his arms hanging at his sides. As I watched, he slipped down gently to a sitting position and started coughing blood. In a couple of seconds, he folded over and lay still. The rickety stairs screeched under pounding feet. The door to the street below banged open and shut.

Now it was really time to go somewhere. I jumped past Al and Ricco and pounded down the stairs behind the killers. Not chasing. Just getting away from that double killing. The cops are very nasty about guys found in such spots.

When I hit the street, it was empty and quiet. The killers were gone. Not that it

made any difference. In a general way, I knew who they were. Felix Cato's boys. Maybe Felix himself. Smart guys in the know had understood for a long time that sooner or later Al or Felix would have to go. So it was Al. After learning from Morey Stebbins that Al had laid all the green against the Trojans, the killers had probably got Al down on a fake call, waiting for him in the dark hall.

I pounded the pavement to the old Plymouth and popped in under the wheel. Mandy grabbed my arm as I meshed gears.

"What's up, Turner?"

"Mayhem and homicide, honey. Someone beat hell out of old Morey Stebbins and hung around to kill Al Braun. Lucky for me they did."

Mandy's breath was coming fast between her parted lips.

"Let's drop it, Turner. I've no right asking you to do this for Clay."

"I'm not doing it for Clay."

"Or for me."

"I'll decide how much I've got a right to do for you, baby. Now just shut up and let me think."

I wasn't doing bad for an average guy. I put Al Braun's killing together with what

Jimmy Parkhurst had told me, and my thoughts kept getting hotter. Stopping at a corner drug store, I found a telephone and ordered the police and an ambulance for Morey. While I was there, I looked up the address of the Winchester Towers.

The lobby was empty. We went across to the automatic elevator and up. At the third floor, we got out and went down to apartment 307. Moving up quietly, I plastered a big quivering ear to the door and listened. Two people were talking inside. A man and a woman. I recognized the throaty voice of Sherry Allen, but the man's was lower, a mumble I couldn't identify. But I bet myself a bottle of rye I knew who owned it. Making a fist, I knocked.

"Open up," I said. "Al sent me."

The night lock clicked and the door opened a crack. A quick shove made the crack wide enough for me to push through into the room. Sherry fell back a step, her hard emerald eyes getting harder. She'd traded the green gown and the negligee for a street dress with more on the top but less on the bottom. I got one glimpse of long nylon legs and was sorry I didn't have time for more than a passing glance.

HOUSTON UNION STATION

IN TEXAS they say, "If it isn't the biggest then it's just got to be the best." Houston's Union Station may not compare in size with the terminals at St. Louis, Chicago or Kansas City, but in keeping with the "fastest growing industrial city in America" it's a bustling, lively railroad center, full of color and movement.

Four major railroads use the facilities of Houston Union Station. Donald Sims writes about them in our September issue and backs up what he says with 30 of the best railroad photos ever taken anywhere. Don't miss it. On sale now, or send 35c to

RAILROAD

MAGAZINE

205 E. 42nd St.
N. Y. City 17



Most of my time I gave to the tall blond guy who came up out of a chair like a shot. Handsome. The body beautiful. Everybody's post-graduate All-American. It was Clay DeGrange.

"What the hell's the idea?" he snarled.

Sherry answered. Her voice was like her eyes now. Plenty hard.

"This guy's a big snoop. His name's Turner Jones."

DeGrange moved forward.

"Don't tell me, baby. I know the guy."

I make a point of never swapping punches with fullbacks. When DeGrange dove at me, I swiveled away and looked desperately for an equalizer. At the same time, Sherry Allen jumped for a big purse she'd left lying on the sofa and began fumbling at the catch. I latched onto a handful of red hair and jerked. She dropped the purse and backed up with a squeal. By that time, DeGrange had caught up with me. I landed on my fanny and scooted. He hit me on the migraine side, damn him. I thought I was dying.

MANDY stood very still in the doorway. Her eyes and voice were as withering as the blast of a furnace.

"Fine stuff, hero. You've shown your muscles. Now, for the sake of your neck, you'd better sit down and listen."

It must have been the reference to his beautiful neck. Anyhow, he minded like a dear. Sherry, too. Together, they backed up to the sofa and sat. Seeing that I was no longer in danger of having my bones broken into small pieces, I crawled to my feet.

"I'll just tell the story," I said. "It'll save time that way. You shouldn't play craps, Clay. You're not lucky enough. Al Braun collected a bundle of your promisory paper to prove it. Trouble was, you couldn't pay off. Al always made it a policy to collect debts, though, so he came up with a very fancy idea. The Trojans have a

game coming up with the Badgers. Without you, the Trojans can't win. It was Al's idea that if you stayed out, he could lay a sure bet on the Badgers that would bring him many skins. In return, he'd tear up your paper.

"This appealed to the heel in you, so you holed up here in Sherry's apartment, intending to show up after the game with a story of being snatched by parties unknown. A profitable deal for everyone concerned, except the suckers who bet on the Trojans, and maybe Clancy Morgan."

DeGrange leaned forward, licking dry lips. At the moment, he didn't look much like a hero.

"Maybe Clancy doesn't need to know."

"Maybe not. If you play football."

He shivered. Actually.

"I can't play now. You know that. Al Braun's laid his bets. Al doesn't like being crossed."

I waved it away.

"Al won't care. Al won't care about anything. He's dead. Felix Cato isn't, though. Felix is very much alive. He said to tell you he's got ten grand on the Trojans. He said to tell you he wants you in that game real bad."

The expression of sick relief on his face wasn't pretty to look at. I shifted my eyes to Sherry Allen's nylons and felt better.

"So long, baby. If you ever get tired of heroes, remember little Turner Jones."

"You never can tell when a gal may want a change," she said.

Mandy and I went out and down the hall, and Mandy put a hand on my arm.

"Maybe you think she gave you a rain check, sucker."

"Sounded sort of like it."

"To hell with her. To hell with that red-headed you-know-what."

The hand on my arm seemed suddenly very possessive, and I began to feel pretty good. For a guy who'd just been clobbered on his migraine by a fullback, damn good.

THRILL

DIME
DETECTIVE
MAGAZINE

DOCKET

Next Issue Published October 3rd



You couldn't blame Ed for calling it a dream. Why else would a beautiful blonde stranger run up and kiss him in Grand Central, tell him a wild tale about two hoods trying to kidnap her, and whisk him off in a cab?



The dream became a nightmare when she ran into an old brownstone . . . and vanished into thin air. Both the old gentleman and the butler swore she wasn't there. Then, in an upstairs room, Ed found one of the hoods, very dead. . . .



It was a crazy story to take to the police, but Ed had to try. The inspector rewarded him with raised eyebrows and a pitying smile. For when they looked in the upstairs room in the sinister brownstone, the corpse was gone. . . .



Ed knew he hadn't made it all up when he found himself a prisoner—with a guard who was very handy with a sap. . . . The complete story of the will-of-the-wisp blonde will be told by Craig Rice and Mark Hope in the December issue.

SOMETHING

Steve knew that dancing with the glamorous Mrs. Nick Sayer was dynamite—for Mr. Sayer was out of the pen, and he already had one good reason for wanting Steve dead!



He seemed to have floated into the room. . . .

LOU WRIGHT, the criminal lawyer, was a medium-sized man, a little on the pudgy side, with sparse brown hair, straight features and severe eyes. With people he liked, he had a broad, warm

smile. He sat slouched behind his desk, tapped a pencil on the glass top and said to the tall, well-set man sitting in the client's chair:

TO SHOOT ABOUT

Dramatic

Murder

Novelette

By MEL COLTON



"I thought I'd let you know, Steve, that Nick Sayer and George Tassman got out of the 'Big House' yesterday."

"So?"

"So, five years ago when you got the goods on them, you were a special investigator for the state. Now you're just a private shamus, and your protection won't be so holy."

Steve Stone rolled a cigarette around in his fingers and then smoothly, without any show of concern, pushed it in his lips and

lit it. "You're telling me to watch my step."

Lou threw the pencil aside and leaned over the desk. "Look, Steve, I've always liked you. I think you're square. I liked you even when you used to shove convicting evidence down my throat when I was trying to get some of my boys off a rap. Okay. Now you're a shamus and I still like you. So I'm giving you this tip. Nick and George were and are my clients, and I know how they feel about you."

"They still think I dug up a false set of books on them just so the DA could send them up?"

Lou nodded. "You remember my defense. I said it was a political move to send them up and stop their Casa Coronado gambling house."

"The DA needed the election," Steve grinned, "but I didn't go after those records with that in mind. And the conviction didn't stop the syndicate from operating."

Lou spoke harshly. "No, they closed the Coronado and opened three months later as the Casa Cove, with Manian operating it bigger and better than before."

"With Nick and his auditor George Tassman out of the way."

Lou smiled. "It smelled of frame, Steve. And although it started as a local clean-up deal, it came Federal when you dug up those books. Five years for income tax invasion for Nick and George. Yet, as you remember, George swore under oath that his signature had been forged and he'd never seen those books."

"I know," Steve said, "but he never could produce the real set."

Lou set his severe eyes on Steve. "Those records were stolen and false ones substituted. Your part was to break in—without legal entry—and bring the phony books to court." Lou waved a jury finger at Steve. "I'm only warning you because I think you were jigged into the frame. I believe you regretted the whole thing when you thought it over. You quit your job

right after the trial was over, didn't you?"

"Yeah," Steve said. "Something like that. It got a little hot in the department."

Lou got up and extended his hand. "Nice seeing you Steve. Just thought I'd let you know. Watch your step. I don't know about George Tassman, but I do know Nick Sayer came up the hard way and can get mean."

Steve got up, stretched his six feet and took the lawyer's hand. "Thanks for the warning, Lou," he said, "but I've been around."

Steve walked the three blocks from Lou Wright's office to his own. He hesitated at the office building's parking lot, then walked to his car, opened the glove compartment and saw his .38 still snug in an under-arm holster. He closed the compartment, retraced his steps and took the elevator up to the tenth floor.

It was a two-office affair with a small reception room. It was empty. The girl who worked for both Steve and the occupant of the other office, an accountant, was out to lunch.

Steve unlocked his office door and entered a gloomy, damp room. His office consisted of a desk, slightly secondhand with ash-burn marks along the edges. There was a green blotter on the desk and a phone. Nothing else. Against one wall was a file case filled with magazines and half a fifth of scotch and three pony glasses (in case business got good and he had two clients instead of one) and a few case histories. There was a dirt-splashed window which looked out to a fire escape and the barred windows of a jewelry broker opposite. There was a calendar on the other wall and a license in a glass frame allowing Stephen Stone to conduct a private detective agency according to the laws of the State of California.

There was a telephone message slip on his desk. It read: *Important. Meet me at the Ocean Tavern in Beachtown at eight tonight. Casa Cove business. Nick Sayer.*

Steve reread it and thought it over in his mind. He ran a tongue slowly around his teeth and stared at the note. Nick Sayer wanted to see him about Casa Cove business. When Steve took his eyes from the note, there was a hardness in his face. Small lines appeared in his forehead and his lips pressed together. Then he went to the file case, took out the bottle of scotch and a pony glass, went into the reception room and washed the glass at the water cooler, then filled the glass with three fingers of scotch and drank it straight down. The liquor burned going down. He had tasted better.

He walked slowly back into his office and looked at the green, thread-bare rug which he had tried to hide by placing the chair over the worse spot. Despite the fact that as a private detective he also was adept at opening safes—if clients so desired—he hadn't been very successful financially. It was like Lou Wright had said; he was a square shamus.

That night at eight o'clock, Steve parked his car on a sandy lot behind the Ocean Tavern and went in looking for Nick Sayer. It was a long narrow room with a television set up over the bar. Steve found a rear booth and ordered a scotch. The wrestling matches were on the screen, and the five customers lined up at the bar didn't turn to notice him. The bartender said he hadn't seen anyone that resembled Nick Sayer. Steve described his friend as tall, sallow-faced, gray at the temples and with grayish-green eyes under heavy brows.

Nick Sayer never showed up. . . .

THERE are two ways to gamble: either you take your chunk and lay it down and shoot it, win or lose, and walk away; or you play it in dribbles until you walk away. It is strictly a matter of time either way. The burnished-blond girl at the Casa Cove liked the first method. Picking up the dicebox, she shoved all her chips in front of her and said quietly:

"A grand, houseman. Win or lose."

Steve felt the tension around the dice table. He'd felt it as soon as he entered the Casa Cove, as if the house were on its toes, straining. He felt it as he sat by the bar, watching the girl, and sensed it in the way the broad-shouldered guy with the bulgy coat stayed next to him. Steve watched the girl with interest.

She was rather tall, with a smooth, ivory skin. Her eyes were shadowed and drawn to a thin line and her lips and chin were set well. She wore a green gown with sequins, high at the neck and softly draped to bare a soft, beautiful pair of rounded shoulders. She wore a baguette setting of diamonds on her left ring finger that caught the ceiling lights just above and had enough carats to send the light right back up.

The poker-faced houseman nodded, counted chips at his bank and stacked them to meet hers. She moved back, pushing against onlookers and players, rattled the dicebox and then rolled. The white cubes scampered across the green, hit the end and jumped back.

Snake-eyes. The crowd murmured in sympathy. The houseman, without change of expression, raked in her chips. She dropped the box, turned and walked over to the bar and settled next to Steve. The bartender managed a sickly smile.

"Sorta tough, Mrs. Sayer," he said sympathetically.

She shrugged those nice shoulders. "Salty all week, Nemo. Let's have a short scotch."

She turned her shadowed blue eyes on Steve, seeking recognition, but when she didn't place him she turned her face away. A nice, expensive perfume reached his nose. She gave Steve the impression of fresh fragrance, of experienced youth—if that were possible—and charm; charm in recklessness and spirit. She was Nick Sayer's wife, Steve assumed. And loaded with dough.

She signed for the drink and drank the

shot in one fast movement. Then the five-piece rhumba band started to play softly over in the far corner where the dance floor was situated. The dance floor was a square of tessellated floor where a section of the all-over gray rug had been removed. The girl started to sway slightly with the rhythm. She moved her head and caught Steve's eyes and said, with the same indifference she had displayed in dropping the grand:

"You rhumba?"

Steve grinned. "Four steps my limit."

"Good enough."

They walked to the dance floor and stepped into a rhumba. She was wonderfully light and buoyant, and Steve knew he could forget his reason for being there, or any other affiliations, if she would just keep dancing with him. It was clouds, lined in fluff and perfume, and smooth winds with sails dipping just right, and all that stuff one thinks about when the situation is right and the enjoyment is there.

The first number ended and they smiled. It was nice. But it didn't last. Steve felt a light tap on his shoulder and turned to see a heavy-set, dark, deep-eyed man in a tux smiling at him. "Pardon me, but you're wanted in the office. Follow me, please."

Steve nodded, excused himself, and left her looking after him, biting her small white teeth into her lips.

Steve followed the shoulders back and around the bar, through a short corridor that opened off the main room to an open door. He came into a completely draped and sound-proofed room, with a large ornate desk on the far side. There were modern chairs and a couch grouped conveniently around a flagstone fireplace that had a small fire glowing. There was a cocktail table, and a decanter of liquor and a siphon and glasses were on the table. The room, where you came to write the checks to cover the additional losses; the comfortable, nerve-softener room.

A man was sitting on the couch, legs

crossed and smoking a pipe. He turned his head slightly as Steve entered. The tux steered Steve around to face the man. He was gray-headed and gray-eyed and had a crisp, carefully trimmed grayish mustache. His features were strong, even and distinguished, yet he had a quality about him that yelled *Dangerous*. He wore a dark blue suit, white shirt and flowered tie. He could have been anybody—lawyer, doctor, judge, executive—but Steve knew him for Boris Manian, gambler, man-about town, fixer and former general manager of Nick Sayer's ill-fated Casa Coronado.

BORIS MANIAN spoke to Steve in a clipped, matured voice. "Sit down, sir." He waved the tux away as Steve sat down. "Have a drink? Help yourself."

"Sure, I'll have one." Steve poured the whiskey in a glass and spilled some over on the table.

Manian kept puffing at his pipe. Finally: "I don't think I know you, although you look familiar. You were recommended, of course."

"The name is Stone. Steve Stone. I'd hardly be recommended here."

The gray eyes sank beneath a frown and Manian's jaw stiffened as his teeth clenched at the pipe stem. "I remember now," he said slowly. "You fingered Nick Sayer and sent him up for five." Steve said nothing. Manian took his pipe out of his mouth and looked at the bowl. "Nick got out yesterday," Manian added, "and now you show up and dance with Nick's wife. Any definite reason for that move, Stone?"

Steve leaned over, elbows on knees, and said, "I dance."

Manian's eyes sharpened. He said, "Very funny."

Steve set his drink down carefully. "Look, Manian, let's get off our tiptoes. I was to meet Nick Sayer at the Ocean Tavern at eight tonight. He wanted to tell me about the Casa Cove. He never showed. So I came here to look around."

Manian said, drawing down the ends of his mouth, "You a shamus now?"

"I have a license issued by the state."

Manian straightened up and fiddled with his pipe again. The tension that had seemed thick in the gambling room was even thicker here. "Just dancing with Donnie Sayer?" he murmured.

"She asked me if I could rumba," Steve grinned. "I said I could."

"You got a lot of guts coming around here," Manian said. "If Nick were here he'd kill you. It's a good thing for you Nick didn't show up at that tavern." He motioned to the tux, who came over quickly. "Show Stone out, Max. He won't be visiting us again."

Steve got up and thanked him for the drink.

"Out the back way, Max," Manian ordered. Then he lifted his head and smiled blandly at Steve. "And I don't advise you try and pick up clients like Donnie Sayer, professionally or otherwise."

Steve thanked him again and followed Max out the door. They went through the kitchen, where hot-faced, white-capped cooks were making food and swearing at each other. At the screen door a lanky hood sat smoking a cigar. A rifle leaned against the wall within his reach.

They both showed Steve out.

It was dark, and the usual ocean fog had rolled in and settled its damp touch against the house. Steve stumbled against the refuse cans on the porch. The banister was wet with ocean spray. The grounds sloped off gradually toward the ocean, hidden somewhere behind the clumps of ghostly looking cypress trees. Steve could hear the waves rolling to shore, but he couldn't see them.

A sharp shot funneled up from the ocean, its sound half smothered by the roar of the waves. Steve edged into the darkness and then ran over the wet grass, dodging between the cypresses until he came to the edge of the cliff overlooking the ocean. He

crouched and looked down, trying to guess the direction of the shot. He saw nothing except the thin white line of the waves moving into a break by the shore. The water was about forty feet below, down a sheer drop. Steve found no way of going down.

From the depths of the fog the faint laboring sound of a motor boat came faintly. The motor roared once and settled down to the straining of hull against the movement of the ocean. A boat had set out.

A breeze came up and slapped his body. Steve pulled his collar up to his ears and slowly retreated back to the house. Around toward the front, huge spotlights lit the Casa Cove's entrance and the parking lot. Steve was starting around in that direction when a figure came out of the dark holding a gun on him.

It was a sharp, demanding voice. "Where you been, bud?" A flashlight appeared suddenly and whipped across Steve's face with a bright beam. Steve blinked. The figure came closer, stopped, waited for a reply.

"Needed a little air," Steve said. "Got lost."

"Where you headed for?"

"My car. And home."

The flashlight went off. "Okay. Blow."

The Casa Cove was like an armed camp. Steve wondered how much they really feared Nick's return to his rightful property. And to what extent would they go to keep him from gaining it back?

Steve wiped the seat of his car of the dew that had settled, got in and checked his glove compartment. His .38 and holster were missing. They had searched his car and taken the gun.

CHAPTER TWO

A Corpse on His Hands

STEVE sat for a moment drumming his fingers on the steering wheel. Then he closed the glove compartment, put the car

into gear and drove out, past a reddish neon sign that read *Casa Cove. Dining and Dancing*, and onto a country road.

Two headlights snapped on from a car parked by the side of the road. It started up and followed behind Steve. When he stepped on the gas, the two lights grew smaller, then suddenly came larger as it caught up. The lights followed Steve all the way into town. He pulled up in front of an all-night hamburger stand where a few people were gathered about the horse-shoe counter. Steve went in and sat down at the far end and ordered a coffee. A kid with a crew haircut and a wide-eyed girl were listening avidly to the jukebox, on which a gargle-throated tenor was chopping a song into bits. They liked it. They dropped another nickel and got it again.

A car came up and parked behind Steve's. It was a long convertible job. The door opened and Steve saw the burnished blonde again, now wrapped in a white fur jacket. She stepped around the car and entered. Everyone turned at her entrance.

She was class all packaged up in expensive ribbons. She was Mrs. Sayer—Donnie Sayer—and she walked over and sat down at Steve's side. She looked at him, put her small beaded bag on the counter and said, "You mind?"

"Of course not, Mrs. Sayer."

"You know my name?"

"Manian told me."

She ordered coffee. Steve added, "Manian also told me to keep away from you."

She seemed nervous; her long, well-kept hands were fumbling with her bag. Her eyes opened wide as she asked, "What did he tell you?"

The two coffees came and Steve took out a pack of cigarettes, offered her one and then lit both. "He advised me against trying to pick you up—as either a client or a dame."

She turned half way to Steve, her hand touching his sleeve. "You an attorney?"

"A private detective."

Her eyes searched his face. "You know a Steve Stone?"

Steve started to sip his coffee, then slowly set it back in the saucer. "Very well. I'm Steve Stone."

Her eyebrows pinched as her hand left his sleeve. Her lips opened slowly. "Oh."

Steve said quickly, "I can guess what you're thinking but I didn't knowingly frame Nick."

She took a long puff and watched the smoke float upward. She fingered the handle of her cup. She smiled but it wasn't genuine. It was forced. "Nick got out yesterday," she said, "but I haven't seen or heard from him."

She shrugged. She didn't seem to worry too much about Nick. "Lou Wright is my only contact with Nick," she added. "Lou just told me he got out. It's difficult to keep waiting and waiting. . . ."

Steve thought of the shot in the fog. He thought of Nick Sayer and the tension and the armed guards at the Casa Cove, and he wondered if that shot meant that Nick had arrived. The waitress came over with the check. Steve put a half dollar down and pushed the cups away.

"I think you better get some sleep, Mrs. Sayer, and just wait. It's better that way."

They both got up and she took her bag. It seemed heavy for just the usual womanly articles. It seemed she might be carrying a little protection in a small caliber gun. She needed it, with what she carried around in money and looks at early morning hours.

Steve escorted her to her car and she got in. She extended a hand and Steve took it. She said, "I'm sorry I followed you, but when Max tapped you I knew you were marked for Manian. You see, I knew Nick wanted to see you first when he got out."

Steve would have taken her hand home with him if she hadn't slipped it slowly, but not without acknowledgement, from his grip. She smiled but there was worry in it. "Please be careful," she warned, then drove away.

STEVE stood and watched the two big taillights dim into the night. Donnie Sayer, the wife of the man he had helped send up, telling him to be careful, while she was throwing thousand-dollar chips about like confetti.

Steve went back to his car and drove home. He lived in a kitchenette apartment house, with two stories, two entrances and a lot of privacy. It was off the busy streets and it was quiet. He opened his door, switched on the light in his combination sleeping and living room, went into the kitchen, turned on the light, took a short snort from a bottle under the sink cupboard, then took off his clothes, laid them on a chair and went into the bathroom and took a shower. He wrapped a robe around him, then swung the roll-away bed out of its alcove into the room. A man came lurching out, hitting him on the shoulder and driving him to the wall.

The man kept coming at Steve for about two feet, head down; then he flopped on his face. Steve stepped around him and looked into the alcove behind the bed. No more bodies, but there was a pool of blood on the floor where the man had been cramped in.

Steve came back and turned the man over. He was a tall man with a pale face, deep eyes with heavy brows. His hair was practically white but Steve couldn't mistake the one-time dashing gambler and big-time promoter he'd sent up—Nick Sayer. He was dead. There was a bullet hole in his head just above the temple. It was a direct close shot and it was meant to kill quick.

He was wearing a brown suit, a brown shirt and a light brown tie. It was splotted with blood stains about the collar and chest and there were drips of blood down his trousers and onto his shoes. His coat bulged. Steve opened the coat and saw an under-arm holster with a Mauser still intact. Nick had been caught suddenly, unexpectedly, or the Mauser would have been noisy and effective. Steve looked around

the room. There were no bullet holes or torn plaster.

Steve went through Nick's pockets but found nothing important. He thought of Donnie Sayer. Had she detained him on purpose? Their conversation hadn't amounted to much. If Steve hadn't stopped at the hamburger stand, would she have detained him somewhere else? It was a plant, for sure, but Steve didn't want to believe Donnie Sayer was part of it. And yet. . . .

One thing Steve knew: he wasn't going to try and get rid of the body. There was too much blood on the floor and too much dead character to lug around. But an alibi wouldn't be a bad idea.

He put his robe back in the bathroom, quickly redressed, turned out the lights and left his room. Nobody had seen him come up to the apartment and nobody was going to see him sneak out the rear entrance, around the incinerator and to the side street.

He drove out of the section and up to a lovers' retreat named Inspiration Point. He parked, shut off his lights and tried a little sleeping. About an hour later a spotlight splashed his car and a hand-light settled on his face. Steve got up and shook his head. It was working out just fine. He knew the cops patrolled this area because of some recent robberies of petting couples.

A cop peered in. Steve yawned.

"Alone?" The cop looked in the back. He was use to seeing them in pairs up here. "Got tired," Steve said. "Fell asleep."

The cop shook his head at Steve's ignorance. "Sure bait for a stick-up, fella. This your car?"

Steve nodded and took out his wallet. He was setting up his alibi that he had never gone back to his apartment. Steve showed his wallet and the photostat copy of his agency license.

"A shamus, eh?" The cop grinned. "What you doing up here, looking for clients?"

"Just sleep, pal, just sleep," Steve muttered tiredly.

The cop took a good look at Steve. Steve helped him out by turning on the ceiling light and rearranging himself in the front seat. The cop shut off his hand-light and went back to the squad car, shaking his head. The squad car backed up, made a U turn and went down the hill, throwing their spotlight here and there on the road.

And that was that.

THE early morning sun was strong, dissipating the night haze. The public buses were beginning to hurry toward their designation points to pick up the early rush of morning workers. Cars were turning off their headlights and you could hear the factory equipment begin to moan and grind.

Steve drove downtown and parked in his office building's parking lot, signed the elevator register, and went to his office. It was cold and bleak. He sat down behind his desk, lifted his feet and caught up with some much-needed sleep.

A sharp ring broke through and Steve jerked awake. The phone was ringing and the sun was steaming through the window, catching Steve and the desk in a square orange light. It was hot and stuffy. He heard the clatter of the typewriter in the reception room and the rush of traffic downstairs in the street.

The phone stopped ringing. He grabbed the receiver but got an empty line. He hung up. He stared at the phone as if trying to make up his mind. Then he picked it up and dialed. A woman's voice came through, telling him it was the law offices of Louis Wright. Steve gave his name.

A short click and Lou's excited voice broke through. "Steve? Where the hell are you?"

"Why?"

"Why?" It was loaded with question. Then he said calmly, sounding very professional, "Nick Sayer was found murdered in your apartment this morning by a

maid who was cleaning. You know that?"

Steve said carefully, "No, I don't."

There was a pause. Then: "You weren't home at all last night? You can prove it?"

Steve thought of the cop on Inspiration Point. "Yeah."

He heard Lou take a deep breath and blow some of it through the phone. "Okay, Steve, I just want to help you. The police will have a tag out for you soon, if they don't already. I figured you might be out of town by now."

"You mean you thought I knocked Nick off?"

"I didn't say that. But I know law and I know how it can bounce around until it hits something."

"Yesterday after I left you," Steve said, "I had a telephone message on my desk. It was from Nick, asking me to meet him at the Ocean Tavern. It was about Casa Cove."

Lou seemed interested. "What happened?"

"He didn't show. I didn't expect him to, Lou. He didn't make the phone call."

"I don't follow."

"The message read Casa Cove. Nick wouldn't use that name. He knew it as his joint, the Casa Coronado. The message was a ruse to keep me away from my room."

Steve thought of the loss of his gun and wondered about the caliber hole in Nick's head. It had looked like a .38. He didn't say anything about it, and with Lou's warning to be careful, they both hung up.

Steve saw a man's coat in front of him and then an arm and a gun pointed at the tip of his nose. He saw a thin man with hollow cheeks and a pale skin—the skin of a confined man suddenly exposed to free air. The eyes were deep set, and a long hook nose jutted out from beneath a snap-brim hat.

Steve looked at his door. It was closed. The typewriter still clacked outside. Steve said, "George Tassman."

The man nodded, a sour grin on his tight

lips. "You remember me, the man you framed for five years?"

Steve made a slight motion. "Won't you sit down?"

George Tassman made a slow negative motion with his head. He set the gun closer to Steve's nose—about two inches away. "You rat," he said. "You dirty politician. You gave me five years on a frame. Now I'm back. No business. Nothing to come back to—except you."

STEVE watched the man's eyes. Dead serious eyes; eyes that had kept a purpose behind them as many years as they had suffered. But they were not jumpy eyes of a hopped-up con who takes the needle for the necessary courage. Steve felt easier. You can't talk to a hop-head.

Steve said, "Be sensible."

"I'm sensible. I've had years of time to figure out how sensible I was going to be." He made a short jab with the gun and the front sight raked Steve's nose, drawing a little blood.

Steve kept his eyes away from the gun and looked at Tassman's bright, brittle eyes. Looking at your future through a gun barrel was not a happy feeling.

"Like it to blow off in your face, rat?" Tassman snapped.

Steve said grinely, "I took a set of books. I didn't know they were falsified records. You claimed they were. Okay, you lost. Five years. Now you're back. Maybe you were right. But shooting me won't help you any."

"I'll feel better." Tassman grinned tightly. "I'll feel a hell of a lot better."

"That won't bring the real books back."

Tassman seemed to go all to pieces. His hand shook and his mouth twisted. "So you *did* know about the real ones!"

Steve shook his head slowly, his nose missing the front sight by a whisker. "Not then, Tassman. But I think now that you were framed, along with Nick."

"That's nice of you," Tassman said.

"Real nice. But isn't it a little late?" His body seemed a bundle of nerves keyed up to the breaking point. "I've got you. I had a hell of a time last night with you. I've been tailing you since you left Wright's office."

A cold empty feeling shot through Steve. His stomach began knotting up. "Then you know that Nick was murdered?"

Tassman's jaw sagged. He gaped at Steve and his gun hand dropped slowly to his side. Steve could have taken him then, but he didn't need to. Tassman was back to rational thinking.

George Tassman stood in front of the desk facing Steve, his chin on his chest, his shoulders humped, looking like a man in a trance. Then he turned slowly, muttered, "Murdered," and walked slowly to the door, opened it and left.

The clacking of the typewriter came louder as the door opened, then shut off as it closed. Steve wiped a shaky hand over a wet forehead. Then he took out a handkerchief and wiped the clot of blood on his nose.

That cold clammy feeling again, and the thought: If Tassman had tailed him, then he knew Steve had gone up to his room and his alibi of not being home was iced. . . .

Steve dashed out of the office, passed the wide-eyed receptionist. She was new. The other one would have been used to his crazy dashings.

He caught the elevator, pushed a fat man out of the way, rather roughly, and hurried out of the building in an attempt to catch sight of Tassman. He had lost him. He turned into the parking lot and got into his car.

Two men got in with him. One in front, the other in the back seat. The one in front pushed a gun into Steve's ribs. Steve looked at him. He wasn't in a tux, but it was Manian's man Max. And Max was very polite.

"We drive," said Max. "We drive out slow and courteous-like. No accidents,

understand? The boss wouldn't like it."

Steve nodded. He drove out of the lot, waved to the parking attendant, and got involved in the downtown traffic. They had to crawl until they got out of the busy section, and then Steve still went slow. Max gave him a poke.

"We don't make a funeral yet," he advised. "We can afford at least forty miles an hour."

Steve made it forty.

"The Casa Cove," Max directed. Then Max leaned back and grinned. "You shouldn't have knocked Nick off," he told Steve. "That wasn't smart."

Steve smiled with tight lips. "Yeah," he muttered, "it wasn't smart."

CHAPTER THREE

The Man With the Books

THE Casa Cove and that cozy room again. Manian was sitting on his favorite seat on the couch, sucking on his pipe, and in a nearby chair Mrs. Donnie Sayer was smoking a cigarette in a long ebony holder. Her hair was newly set and she wore a green suit and a brown blouse with a gold-key choker. She looked away as Steve was marched into the room in front of Max. She wasn't wearing mourning for Nick, but her lips trembled slightly and her eyes were none too bright.

Manian waved a soft hand. "Sit down, Stone. Drink?"

"Too early."

"You know Mrs. Sayer."

Mrs. Sayer kept her head averted. Steve said, "We've met."

Manian leaned back and puffed his pipe. He said quietly, "Nick Sayer was killed with your gun."

Steve narrowed his eyes and said sharply, "With the gun you stole from my car last night."

Mrs. Sayer looked up. She didn't say anything.

Manian looked at Steve with curiosity, then he managed a small smile. "It happens even to smart shamuses and former special investigators." Manian raised his eyebrows. "One frame deserves another."

Steve said tonelessly, "That puts the kill on you."

Manian smiled thinly. "Not necessarily. It just places the gun where it belongs. I was here all last night."

Steve leaned forward. "One of your boys."

Mrs. Sayer's head came up and her eyes went wide. She made a crumbled mess of her cigarette as she nervously pressed it out in an ash tray.

Manian pointed to the cocktail table where the whiskey was. "Need a drink now, Stone?"

"Still too early." Steve was leaning over, rubbing a palm over his knuckles.

Manian nodded. "Very well. Stone, about five years ago you were pretty handy with your fingers and a safe and the stealing of records. Forged records. You know that by now. But it got rid of Nick and his crazy auditor."

Steve stole a glance at Mrs. Sayer. She was fumbling with her bag. Steve wondered if she had protection with her. He wondered just whose side she was on. He figured the money side and went back to looking at Manian.

"Nick got out and came back for those books," Manian continued, "and got a slug instead. I didn't do it. Nick worried me but not so much that I'd kill him. Whoever has those records killed Nick, I'm sure of that. But will the cops agree? According to the evidence, good circumstantial evidence, Stone, you're the logical suspect in Nick's murder."

Steve leaned on his elbows and said, "Go on."

"You haven't got those books, I know," Manian said, "but you can get them for us."

Steve raised his eyebrows. "Us?"

Manian nodded. "Mrs. Sayer and I. Now that Nick's dead, Donnie is legally entitled to the Casa providing the right set of books can be located."

Steve was beginning to see the puzzle straighten out. "The books must incriminate you, Manian. So the guy that has them has a hold over you, eh?"

Manian's eyes set hard. "I've been the pawn in this whole damned mess and I'm figuring on a little checkmate of my own. And I got you." He let that set for a minute as he punched his pipe bowl into the the palm of his hand. Then he added, "You open a safe and get those records and you'll get your gun back."

Manian was giving him the lead bait, and he was being about as subtle as a sledge hammer.

Donnie Sayer choked off a scream and fumbled frantically for her bag. Manian looked around and a sudden flush of red covered his face. His pipe shook in his hand.

George Tassman seemed to have floated into the room. He had opened and closed the door before Max¹ could get his hands out of his pockets. Tassman was in the room, important as king of the hill, with a heavy forty-five in his hand.

STEVE just kept rubbing his knuckles and watching Tassman's eyes. Tassman's eyes were bad. They weren't serious anymore; they seemed to jump without much thought behind them, but they went for Manian. They set on him with joyous anticipation.

Tassman growled through this teeth at Manian. "You sit nice and soft while I squat in the ice house for five years." He pushed a short laugh. "My assistant sits in a nice lush couch because he can forge a name pretty good. I had a lot of time to figure you boys out. You, Manian, switched the books and forged my name, and then you tipped the shamus."

Manian sat perfectly still. "Now,

George, let's not get excited, please."

"Squirm, damn you, like I had to squirm on the court stand listening to lies! I had it in for this shamus here, but maybe he was just doing his duty. But you, you double-crossing—"

"Max—"

Tassman laughed that short crazy laugh again. "Max ain't going to do nothing but watch you crack to pieces. I followed the shamus here last night, then went around, hired a boat and came in by the beach. But I couldn't get to you through your guards. I had to shoot one to get free. If it weren't for the fog I'd be with Nick now."

Tassman brought up the gun and leveled it at Manian. Manian choked as he saw the trigger finger start to close.

"George, don't! I'm just the goat! George—I—"

Steve didn't see Donnie Sayer come out with her .22. He didn't think she would ever get it out, the way she had been fumbling with the bag, but it spat and caught Tassman in the chest just as his hand shook with the shot that snapped Manian's head back.

Max lunged forward, hand coming out of pocket, but Steve sprang up and cracked Max on the upper jaw and set him rolling back against the wall.

Tassman fell slowly to the carpet, clutching at his chest and coughing. He didn't seem to be hurt too much. A .22 can't do much damage unless there's a direct hit. Donnie Sayer, gun hanging limp from her hand, got up and came over to Manian and stood looking with horrified eyes. He was soaked with blood, his head against the couch, his pipe lying on the floor with its ashes scattered. He was very dead.

Steve went around Tassman and picked up the phone. He was calling the police when Donnie Sayer dropped the gun, whirled and ran quickly out the door. Steve watched her go. When the police answered, Steve asked for some law at the Casa Cove and hung up.

He went back and picked up Donnie Sayer's gun and slipped it in his pocket. He glanced at Manian, then at Tassman who was groaning more than his wound was worth, and then went out the main door. Donnie Sayer was nowhere in sight. Steve heard the sudden gnashing of gears and the roar of a car taking on speed. . . .

LOU WRIGHT tapped his pencil on the desk again. He frowned at Steve's story of the Casa Cove shooting. "The cops are liable to get you for that, too," Lou warned.

Steve said, "I don't think so. Tassman was out after Manian and got him. Mrs. Sayer can prove self-defense for her part of the shooting."

"But Mrs. Sayer disappeared," Lou reminded him. He pursed his lips and looked around the room, then let his eye come back to his pencil. He started making little round circles with his eraser on the glass-top. "Manian said he could get your gun back for you?"

Steve nodded. "Manian claimed a set of books would clear the title for Mrs. Sayer."

The sun was beginning to claim the room with wide gashes of warm light. Lou Wright and Steve stared at each other for a time. Lou suddenly made a severe angle with his eraser. He set his elbows on the desk and brought a free hand up to his chin. "As I warned you, Steve, the cops now have a tag out for you on Nick's murder. I don't think they'll go too much for that Inspiration Point alibi. It's too planted. Now if you'd had a girl with you—"

"I know," Steve admitted, "but it's the best I got."

"It is just possible it might pull you through," Lou conceded, "providing everything else in the story fitted. But they'll probably get you on the fact that Nick's body was found on the floor."

Steve shifted in his seat and his jaw tightened. He stared at Lou.

Lou lifted his hand from his chin and said, "What's wrong?"

Steve said grimly, "You have the real set of books, haven't you, Lou?"

Lou Wright straightened. His eyes blinked and clouded for the moment. Then he shrugged.

"Yes, I have them, Steve. Manian brought them to me after Nick had been sent up. Maybe I should have told you that, but I'm a criminal lawyer and the books were brought to me after the trial and Nick was already up at the Big House. I realized that Manian had framed Nick with those books and I had to keep quiet. I was going to give them to Nick when he got back—but Manian got Nick first."

"So Manian was the boy in the driver's seat," Steve said. "And Nick's coming back was bad medicine for him."

Lou agreed. "I'm not sorry to hear Manian's dead. He deserved it."

Steve shifted again, put his hand in his pocket and slouched comfortably in the chair. "Other way around, Lou. Nick's coming back meant curtains for you. You killed Nick with my gun."

Lou's hands left the desk and slapped hard against the arms of his chair. Red blotched his face and his eyes glared at Steve. "What did you say?"

Steve spoke quietly, as a man will when he knows what the cards hold. "You called the girl at my office and told her you were Nick, and said you wanted to meet me at the Ocean Tavern at the beach. That Casa Cove was bad. Nick would have said Casa Coronado. That made me smell fish, but I chanced it. You wanted me out of the way, and you wanted Nick alone. And Nick wanted to see me, because his wife told me so. You made Nick think I had the real set of books. You made the arrangement with Nick to meet at my apartment."

Lou relaxed a little and waved a hand across the desk. "Fairy tale."

"I didn't think of you with my gun until I suddenly remembered I hadn't checked

my gun in the glove compartment since leaving my car in the office parking lot. I thought it had been taken at the Cove's lot."

Steve's eyes were narrow. "And finding Nick on the floor should seem natural enough, Lou, except to the murderer who pushed him into the rollaway closet!"

Lou Wright kept staring at the pencil on his desk. Outside a traffic snarl was unwinding itself with horns and shifting gears. A traffic light bell clanged and its stop arm came down with a rusty groan. Lou suddenly wheeled about and faced a small safe behind him. "I'll get the books," he muttered and began to twirl the safe dials.

Steve watched him closely. He knew that what he had on Lou wasn't worth a damn. It was just a matter of how Lou played the game from now on; how emotional Lou would get when the noose was hanging over his own head.

Lou opened the safe and reached for the lower shelf where long ledger books rested. He stuck his hand in and then swept around with Steve's .38 in his hand.

Lou sputtered, "Your gun. I'll say you committed suicide in my office after you made a verbal confession to me. It'll hold in court."

Steve grinned. Lou had done just what Steve thought he would do under stress. What he had hoped he would do. Steve said, "Your fingerprints are all over the gun."

Lou's face went pale and for the instant his eyes dropped to the gun. The .22 of Mrs. Sayer's leaped neatly into Steve's hand and coughed, catching Lou's wrist. The .38 dropped on the desk. Lou swore in pain and made a feeble grab for the gun. Steve pushed the .22 into Lou's wet face and the lawyer settled back, beaten.

Steve reached for the phone. "It was a nice frame while it lasted," he told Lou. "And you built it up nice with me in the middle. The Casa Cove was extra income,

wasn't it, with the hold you had over Manian after he forged the signature? Well, you're a smart lawyer, Lou. Maybe you can talk your way out of this."

* * *

They didn't tap Steve Stone's shoulder when he danced in the square tessellated floor with Mrs. Sayer. You just don't tap the new general manager's shoulder when he's dancing with the boss.

THE END



DAN AND THE DEATH-CELL BUFF

by Richard Deming

As kid rivals of a teeming city's Hell's Half Acre, Big Jim and Dan Fancy had met and fought before. Now Jim, as a powerful city boss, and Dan, as a private op. out to break him, must meet once more—in a no-holds-barred battle from which only one could walk away. Here's a great crime-suspense story of fascinating intrigue; and of a strangely willing victim who refused to be sprung from the death-cell!

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MR. MOUTHPIECE

By JULIUS LONG

"Miss Wolf, your brother's going to be convicted and sentenced to die in the electric chair."



BARRY BODINE was one of a group of a dozen people headed for the waiting elevator car on the main floor of the county court house, but he reached it first and at once the elevator

starter signaled that the door be closed. As the car with its lone passenger shot forward, the persons left behind cast dark looks at the starter, who stood aloof in his gold-braided uniform.

"That was Barry Bodine, the criminal lawyer," one of the waiting men muttered. "You'd think he was a king in this court house."

"He is," commented another, and the group waited in resigned silence.

Barry Bodine emerged from the elevator car at the eighth floor and walked through a crowded corridor suddenly hushed at his presence. Heads turned; whispers were exchanged. Those who knew Bodine spoke self-consciously and received a preoccupied nod.

Bodine continued on until he reached the door of Criminal Court No. Seven. He

Now, as secretary to Judge Cost I might manage to marry a rich criminal lawyer."

Bodine grinned and gestured to the inter-com unit. A moment later he entered the judicial chamber. The occupant was a man Bodine's own age, though Judge Cost looked ten years younger. His face was plump and pink while Bodine's features were lined and haggard. The rumor that the criminal lawyer was about to take a Nevada vacation had been based on his physician's urgent recommendation. Furthermore, until an hour ago, Bodine had resolved to follow it.

Judge Cost, in shirt sleeves, put down a magazine.

"Well, well, Barry! Heard they were running you out of town. To what do I owe the honor of your presence? Didn't know you had a case pending except for

Why was Barry Bodine, the hot-shot criminal lawyer who'd won 112 straight murder cases, doing his damndest to lose number 113?

opened the door and entered a reception room.

"Good morning, Pat. I want to see Cost."

Pat O'Neill, attractive brunette secretary to Judge Cost of Criminal Court No. Seven, presiding judge of the criminal panel, eyed Bodine thoughtfully.

"Rumor's been rampant that the great Barry Bodine at long last was about to take a vacation. Nevada, someone said. What's up?"

"Curiosity can always be pardoned in a beautiful woman," said Bodine. He sighed, removed his Borsalino hat and placed it on the secretary's desk. "It's a shame, Pat, that your beauty's wasted in this dingy room. Why did you ever quit the Varga Club line?"

Pat O'Neill grinned. "Men don't marry show girls because they're afraid their friends will snicker behind their backs.

the Varga gambling debt thing, and that's a civil suit."

"Right. But, with your consent, I'll have a criminal case."

Judge Cost looked perplexed. Bodine explained.

"I wish to be appointed counsel for the defense of an indigent prisoner. As presiding judge of the criminal court, you have the power to make such an appointment."

Cost nodded, perplexed. "Of course. But it's most extraordinary for an attorney of your status to volunteer services for the fee that the state can allow. Usually such appointments are passed out to fledgling lawyers. Have you some special case in mind?"

"Right. The case of the State against John Smith."

The judge's perplexity grew. "Well, there are several John Smiths held for

trial." The judge's eyes widened. "Wait a minute—you don't mean *the* John Smith? Not the *cop-killer*?"

"I do. The man charged with the murder of Patrolman Karl Kuntzman."

Judge Cost stared incredulously. "But—but *why*? You've always been popular with the cops. If you defend Kuntzman's killer, they'll never forgive you—especially when you ask for the case at a fee that's practically nothing."

Bodine shrugged. "Do I get it?"

Cost stared as if he thought Bodine would suddenly burst into laughter and announce that the idea was a joke. Then he saw that Bodine was very serious. He sighed.

"Of course you get the case. Frankly, it takes a great load off my mind. I'd already sounded out several lawyers, and they turned it down. Prepare a journal entry appointing yourself, and I'll sign it."

"I've prepared an entry," said Bodine coolly. He drew a folded sheet of legal cap from his inside coat pocket. The judge read the entry, signed it and handed it back. Bodine picked it up and started for the door. Judge Cost called after him.

"Going to tell me why you took the case?"

"No."

BY THE time Bodine reached the main floor after filing the journal entry, he was overtaken by reporters.

"What's your angle on the cop-killer case?" demanded Pete Novick, crime news reporter for the *Morning Telegram*. "What new evidence have you dug up?"

"None. I know nothing about the case except what I've read in the papers."

Novick laughed. Paul Sugrue, of the *Sun*, asked coldly: "Who's putting up the side dough?"

Bodine whirled angrily.

"You overestimate me, Paul. If John Smith has a dime stashed anywhere, it's a secret from me."

Sugrue laughed. Novick's eyes were narrowed as he asked:

"What's the angle, Bodine? The talk was your doc ordered you to take a vacation. Trying to stretch your string to one hundred and thirteen?"

Bodine smiled wryly. He had tried one hundred and twelve murder cases—and secured hung juries or acquittals in every one.

"I never thought about it, but this case will be the hundred and thirteenth. Let's hope it doesn't break the string."

"You do the hoping," said Novick. "I can't waste the time."

Bodine walked on. By the time he had reached his sleek black convertible parked at the curb in front of the court house steps, the news of his appointment as defense counsel for Kuntzman's killer was being phoned to the city desks of all the newspapers.

Bodine drove past the city jail two blocks down and scarcely gave a thought to his newly acquired client inside. John Smith would have to learn of his appointment as defense counsel from the newspapers or the cellblock grapevine. Bodine didn't care to discuss the case with him today—or any other day.

He parked in a lot close by his office building and went in, receiving the same treatment from the elevator starter that he had been given in the court house. The car had risen only a couple of floors when the operator remarked:

"Hear you've taken the cop-killer's case, Mr. Bodine. Boy, that's sure gonna be a toughie!"

Bodine's blank stare stopped further conversation. Inwardly he marveled at the speed with which news of his appointment had traveled. And the news was ahead of him when he entered his office.

"Have you gone nuts?" Miss Eva Martin, age fifty-three, used a jargon unbecoming to a lady of her mature years. But then, she smoked three packs of cigarettes

a day and could out-drink her employer. Having worked for Barry Bodine for eleven years, she didn't stand on formality with him. "Every cop in town will be down on you, and they've always been the best touts you had!"

Bodine eyed his secretary with genuine curiosity.

"Where did you pick up this tidbit, Eva?"

"It's all over town. You haven't answered my question. Why did you take the John Smith case—of *all* cases?"

Bodine sighed wearily. "It's late in the morning, Eva. I want to finish briefing the Varga case."

Eva frowningly patted down her white hair, brought out a pad and pencil. Bodine ensconced himself behind a desk full of opened or page-marked books and began to dictate.

He had not dictated half a paragraph when the phone rang. Eva answered it, grimaced after listening and said: "Yes, I'm afraid it's true. No, I don't know why he took the case. I'm not his guardian, thank heaven. No, he hasn't come in for the day, and I don't know where to find him."

She hung up, grimly eyeing her employer across the desk. "That's been going on ever since you lost your mind."

"Who was it?"

"Lou Varga. He thinks you've cracked."

"Maybe I have. Read back that last sentence."

Bodine had finished dictating another paragraph when the phone rang again. This time a lawyer friend was checking the rumor. Bodine slammed a book shut in disgust.

"I'm giving up."

Eva Martin frowned. "You've put off doing this Varga brief for weeks."

"There won't be any Varga brief. I'm going out to see Varga and tell him he's got to settle the case. I'm tired of doing impossible things for that man."

"I'm glad you're becoming sensible and taking only easy cases like the cop-killer one." Eva left the room before Bodine could comment. She returned at once.

"There's a girl outside. She wants to talk to you about the John Smith case. She looks like the guy's picture in the papers. Five will get you ten she's his kid sister."

"I don't remember what the guy looked like."

"He was good looking, but this girl, Jean Wolf, is super. A blonde. Natural. Beautiful figure. Natural."

Bodine had risen from his chair. He sat down again. He nodded, and Eva ushered in a blonde girl.

"This is Miss Joan Wolf."

EVA closed the door behind her, and Bodine scrambled to his feet to hold a chair for the girl. Joan Wolf lived up to her advance notices. Her blonde hair was indeed natural, and her golden tan seemed natural too. In fact, she was that rare creature—a genuine beauty who was completely natural. She couldn't be more than twenty, yet she had plenty of poise. But she was worried. Tension was in every line of her young face. She eyed Bodine straightforwardly with deep blue eyes.

"Mr. Bodine, why did you take the John Smith case?"

"Did you come here just to ask me that?" His voice would have been even more irritated if Joan Wolf hadn't been such a beautiful girl.

"No, but I want to know why you took the case. I'm hoping against hope that it's because you've discovered some evidence the papers haven't told about."

"Then stop hoping. I haven't."

The girl studied him, decided that he spoke the truth and somehow seemed to age a couple of years. Bodine asked:

"Are you going to tell me that John Smith is a relative—a brother, perhaps?"

Joan Wolf nodded. "I saw his picture in the papers. I knew it was Charlie,

though I hadn't seen him for several years. You see, he ran away from home."

"Why?"

"There was trouble. My father has always been very strict. He is the richest man in our town, but he would never give Charlie any spending money. He said Charlie had to earn his money the way he did when he was a boy." Joan Wolf lowered her eyes. "Charlie was always proud. He thought it made him a laughing stock to have to take errand boy jobs when his father was the richest man in town. He tried to rob a filling station. He didn't have the nerve to get away with it, and he was caught."

"Did he use a gun?"

Joan Wolf lowered her eyes. "I know how it looks. If anyone ever finds out about it, it will make things even worse for Charlie. But maybe no one will ever find out. Dad fixed the thing up without Charlie even having to spend a night in jail. It was right after that that Charlie ran away from home. I haven't seen or heard from him since. I doubt that he even knows that Mother died."

Bodine studied the girl.

"Have you visited your brother in jail?"

She winced. "No. I know what you're thinking, but it's not true. I wasn't ashamed to go there. It's just that I know why Charlie is calling himself John Smith and concealing his true identity. I don't want to undo everything for him."

"He's already undone everything himself. He's going to be convicted and sentenced to die in the electric chair."

The girl's pallor showed through her golden tan.

"But you can't mean that! You've never lost a murder case! You wouldn't take this one if you thought you were going to lose it!"

"Wouldn't I?" Bodine's steady stare convinced the girl. Tears welled in her eyes. She dug into her handbag and produced a package of bills.

"When Mother died I inherited some money from her side of the family. Rightfully half of it should belong to Charlie. Here's his share—five thousand dollars. I'm giving it to you as a retainer for defending him. If you get him off I'll give you my half of the inheritance too."

Bodine stared at the package of bills placed on his desk. He thought he might be sick. He forced himself to meet the girl's eyes squarely.

"Keep the money. The state will pay me a fee for defending your brother. It will be enough. I can do nothing for him. I told you once, and I'll tell you again—he's going to die in the electric chair."

It was as if he had struck her with his fist. He continued to look her squarely in the eyes.

"Consider the facts. The Moderne Supermarket is out on Miracle Drive, a newly opened trunk highway. It cuts around the fringe of the city, and it's not yet built up. The Moderne store is isolated. It's one of those colossal places with a plate glass front making the entire thing a sort of show case. The take each Saturday is terrific, and twice the manager was held up after closing hours on Saturday nights.

"The Moderne brass hats yelled for police protection. The beat patrolman, one Karl Kuntzman, had been on the job before but had only managed to get there in time to see the fleeing stick-up men. It was decided to plant him in the building with the manager each Saturday night. A robber, looking through the plate glass front, couldn't see him. On the second Saturday the gag was tried, your brother fell for it.

"Kuntzman came out of hiding but he wasn't quick enough. Your brother shot him dead. He turned and fled from the store, but a prowler car had been assigned just in case, and he ran right into its armed crew. And now, Miss Wolf, do you really think your brother has the slightest chance to escape the electric chair?"

THE girl's face had grown drawn and bloodless. "But you're not telling all that was in the papers. My brother told the police his own version of what had happened. He says he was waiting on the corner for a hitch-hike ride when the manager of the store came to the door and called him inside. He offered him a dollar to get a package and deliver it to a customer. Just as Charlie stooped to pick up the package, the policeman appeared and drew a gun. He swore at Charlie and accused him of being a hold-up man. Charlie saw that the policeman meant to shoot him. He reached into his pocket and drew out an automatic pistol. He fired in self-defense because he knew he was being framed and would be shot down in cold blood. Then he ran out of the store and was caught by the prowl crew. The fact that he didn't shoot at those officers proves he isn't a killer."

Bodine did not enjoy having to disillusion the girl.

"I'm sorry, Miss Wolf, but it proves nothing of the sort. The prowl cops had heard the shot and had drawn their guns. Your brother was not so stupid as to think he could shoot it out with both of them. He surrendered like a lamb. As for his story as to how he came to be in the store, that's utter nonsense. Obviously he had hidden in the store, waiting for the manager to be alone. The other hold-ups at the market were pulled off in the same way. It's quite possible that your brother is guilty of all of them."

Anger had brought color back to the girl's face.

"I can't understand you! If you believe Charlie's guilty, why did you take his case?"

"My motive is nobody's concern but my own."

Joan Wolf jumped to her feet.

"It's *my* concern! I didn't want to believe the rumor I overheard in the hotel lobby. I heard a man say that you were

only taking the case to make sure that Kuntzman's killer got the chair, that you played ball with the cops in this town and that they'd raised a fund to pay you to make sure that the cop-killer couldn't get off!"

Bodine frowned at her.

"You really believe that?"

"What else can I believe?" She burst into tears. "I'll stop you! I'll go to the judge and tell him that Charlie isn't without funds to hire a lawyer, that he has five thousand dollars! Then he'll have to take you off the case!"

She started for the door. Bodine said: "Then you'll need the five thousand that you've left on my desk."

Joan Wolf turned back, picked up the package of bills and eyed him with wordless contempt before she returned to the door. After her departure Eva Martin entered with a sly grin.

"Kinda got the old master told, didn't she?"

"Eavesdropping again, huh?"

"Natch. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. I never felt so sorry for anyone as I felt for that poor child. Telling her that her own brother was a sure thing for the chair!"

"That's because he is."

Eva fairly screamed, "Then why did you take his case?" She paused, then asked hoarsely, "Could it be true that you're playing ball with the cops? If you are, you're—" She didn't finish. She saw the look in Bodine's eyes. "I'm sorry, it's just that—"

"Forget it, Eva. I'm going out to Varga's place and give him the bad news. I won't be back. Take the afternoon off yourself—it's Wednesday, and everything in town closes at noon."

Bodine left his office, retrieved his car from the parking lot and headed for the north edge of town. He turned left on a boulevard which meandered beside a wide, shallow river and turned in at the spacious

lot of a sprawling night club. It was the Varga Club, owned by his client, Louis Varga. The presence of a dozen cars in the lot at a quarter after ten in the morning proclaimed to any hut the most naive souls that the Varga Club was something more than a night club. The back room housed the ultra-swank gambling casino that was Varga's chief source of revenue.

Bodine was admitted without question to the room. A half-dozen players were active at a dice table and as many sat in at a poker game. Mike Umanski, the casino manager, came up to Bodine with an obsequious smile.

"Giving it a little whirl today, Mr. Bodine?"

"No. I want to see your boss."

Umanski was forever trying to seem shrewd and omniscient. He nodded wisely. Everyone employed at the club knew that Bodine was Varga's lawyer and that Varga was in the middle of a most embarrassing lawsuit filed by the wife of a former patron. The wife claimed that her husband had lost thirty thousand dollars at the casino, and she was suing to get it back.

"Lou's in the office," said Umanski. "Go right in."

BODINE found Varga operating an adding machine, totaling figures penciled on slips. He looked up with more than average curiosity at his visitor.

"Well, hello, Barry. I called your office. That old hag that works for you said you were out. I wanted to know something."

"And I have something to tell you. You're settling your lawsuit."

Varga's broad face clouded. "Why? I thought you said I had a better than fifty-fifty chance."

"I did. I still say so. But if you take the case to court, the newspaper publicity may put the heat on all gambling in this county. Even if you win, you'll lose. Make a deal for, say, fifteen thousand with that woman and keep the thing out of the papers."

Varga had forgotten his adding machine.

"If I do that the word'll get around, and every mark in the racket will try to shake me down for dough he claims he's lost."

Bodine shrugged. "At least you'll still be in business. I've had a feeling about your case, Lou. For weeks I've put off working on the brief. Always when I put off a job it's because I have a subconscious feeling that I've got a loser. I don't go into court with losers, Varga."

A gleam came into Varga's eyes. For a moment he seemed to have forgotten his lawsuit.

"That's right, Barry. You don't go into court with losers. What've you dug up in the John Smith case? That's what I called your office about. All the boys are guessing. My guess is that you've dug up some hot evidence and plan to pull it out of your hat."

"Keep on guessing. But the fact is that John Smith will fry. You can make book on it."

Varga gave him a polite smile of disbelief.

"I know you better than that, Barry. You've got an ace that you're keeping close to your chest." His smile was ingratiating. "Don't try to fool an old friend!"

Bodine studied the night-club man a second, then rose to his feet.

"Have it your own way. Shall I settle that case of yours?"

A pained expression crossed Varga's face, then he nodded:

"I've taken it on the chin so much here lately I might as well go for another fifteen grand. Only try to do better."

"I'll try."

Bodine started for the door. Before he had taken two steps, the door exploded open and a tall, thin man burst into the room. His eyes were frightened, and he did not see Bodine as he ran to the desk and said excitedly:

"Have you heard? Bodine's taken the case! Now what will we—" Belatedly

Varga's look stopped him from going on.

Bodine, curious, noted that Varga's look was deadly. Then the gambler's broad face assumed a genial smile, and he said:

"Good-by, Barry. Do your best."

At the sound of Barry's name the tall thin man became rigid. His eyes were wild as he stared at the lawyer. Bodine walked indifferently from the room.

Outside in his car he sat a moment, reflecting on the strange scene in Lou Varga's office. Obviously Varga had not wanted to introduce his excited visitor. And it was equally obvious that Varga's curiosity in his taking the John Smith case was not idle. Varga had an angle.

Bodine started the engine of his car and drove slowly from the parking lot. He was thinking of the blonde girl, Joan Wolf. He thought he would like to talk to her once more about her brother's case. This time he would listen seriously.

The girl had mentioned overhearing a conversation in a hotel lobby. Bodine guessed that she had checked into one of the two larger hotels. His second call confirmed his guess, but Joan Wolf had checked out, leaving no forwarding address.

Bodine berated himself for not having obtained her home address. For a moment he considered going to city jail and trying to get it out of Charles Wolf, alias John Smith. But he decided that the effort would be futile. He returned to his car and drove downtown to the *Morning Telegram* office. He climbed two flights to the editorial rooms, spied Pete Novick across the floor of the big room and walked to his desk.

Novick grinned up from a battered typewriter. "So the mountain has come to Mahomet! Now how can I serve the Great Bodine?"

"Show me the morgue file on the Kuntzman killing. Also the files on the two previous stick-ups at the Moderne."

"Sure thing. Follow me."

In the *Telegram* morgue Novick pro-

duced a bulging envelope. "The whole works is here. All the stick-ups tie together."

"That's what I'm beginning to think."

NOVICK watched intently as Bodine went carefully through the file. There were the 8x10 glossies from which the half-tones had been made. Bodine studied the picture of Charles Wolf, alias John Smith.

The boy was perhaps twenty-two or three, but he looked older. Despite his dissipated look he closely resembled his sister. Bodine put aside the print and regarded a picture of the glass-fronted supermarket. There was no picture of the store manager. Bodine looked up at the reporter.

"There's something missing. There's no pix of the store manager."

Novick nodded. "That's right. The manager, a nervous, thin-faced guy name of Herbert Atwood, says the company frowns on notoriety for the store managers. Begged us to keep his pix out, and the advertising department backed him up. The Moderne people use two-page spreads on Fridays."

"A thin-faced guy, you say? Tall along with being nervous?"

"That's Atwood. J. Herbert Atwood is his full name, as you must have noticed. Maybe you noticed something else."

"What, for example?"

"There was only one witness to the other two stick-ups besides Atwood. It was this dead cop, Karl Kuntzman. Each time, Kuntzman said he got there just in time to see the thug getting away with the swag. That was why he planted himself inside that night this John Smith let him have it. The store manager thinks the other stick-ups could have been pulled by this same John Smith, only he admits he can't be sure because the other times the guy wore a mask."

Bodine regarded the reporter thoughtfully.

"Are you telling me that John Smith's story could be legit—that the store manager actually invited him into the store to be a fall-guy in a third phony stick-up and that the thing backfired when John Smith turned out to have a gun and shot in self-defense?"

"I'm not telling you anything. But I'd bet my two weeks vacation with pay that you dug up proof of just that before you walked into Judge Cost's office and asked to be assigned the case."

Bodine shook his head. "Pete, you shouldn't gamble. Not even on a sure thing. I've found that out today."

He walked from the newspaper office and climbed into his convertible. He did not notice the drab little coupe until he was a block and a half from the *Telegram* Building. Then he turned suddenly down an alley.

The coupe followed. Bodine stopped the convertible. The coupe pulled up behind him. There were two men in it. Bodine vaguely recalled the driver as a city detective. The passenger was Fred Morrow, a homicide lieutenant.

Morrow got out and walked up to the driver's side of the convertible.

"So you spotted us. Maybe you're insulted that we're tailing you."

"Only flattered that a lieutenant be assigned to the job."

"Well, I didn't like it to begin with. But I don't like you bein' in the Kuntzman case even that much. The boys have always been pretty nice to you."

"I appreciate that."

"Then why you going to spring this cop-killer?"

"I'm not springing him. I'm merely taking his case. He's entitled to counsel. The constitution of our country provides that every accused man be entitled to an attorney whether he is innocent or guilty."

"Well, this guy that calls himself John Smith is guilty as hell. So were a lot of other guys that you got acquitted. The boys

figure that with you in the case John Smith is as good as acquitted."

"You tell the boys they're wrong."

Fred Morrow was not impressed. He lowered his voice and looked meaningfully at the lawyer.

"A pay increase ordinance is up before the city council. The boys figure it to carry, but a black eye to the department will kill it. The boys won't much like it if you hand the department the black eye."

"I have no intention to hand anybody a black eye."

"Then why did you take the John Smith case?"

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you."

"Maybe I would. Lots of people underestimate us cops. We're not so dumb. You got something up your sleeve, Bodine, and it's not good for that pay increase bill before the council."

Bodine forced a laugh. "I may not be the best lawyer in this man's town, but I am certainly the most overrated."

He pressed upon the accelerator pedal, and the convertible shot out from the grasp of the detective's gnarled hand. Bodine watched Morrow glowering after him as he turned into the next street.

THE coupe did not continue after him. He parked in his office lot, used a rear entrance to the building and entered a small restaurant and bar. The noon hour rush was on. Bodine heard a feminine greeting. He turned. Pat O'Neill sat alone in a booth.

"Join me. I've just ordered."

Bodine seated himself opposite the brunette secretary, observing that she was nursing a mixed drink. He smiled a little sadly.

"So even judges cannot control their curiosity. Your boss sent you here where I usually eat lunch with instructions to find out why I asked for the cop-killer case."

Pat O'Neill reddened. She had been a

showgirl most of her life but she was constitutionally naive and ingenuous. She shook her head in automatic denial.

"Judge Cost had nothing to do with this."

Bodine, watching her intently, noted the eager gleam in her eyes. She was telling the truth and getting much satisfaction from being able to. Bodine's lined features formed a haggard little smile.

"All right, so I was wrong. Judge Cost didn't send you here. But your old boss, Lou Varga, did. I'm disappointed in you, Pat."

She flushed and bit her lip. Her fingers toyed with her drink.

"I told Lou you'd be on to me. I had to do it, Barry. One night when I worked at the club I got tight and lost a lot of money. Much more than I could pay out of my salary. Lou laughed it off, but today he called me and reminded me of it."

"What's Lou's angle here? How's he mixed up in the John Smith case?"

"I don't know. I asked him why he was so curious, but he snapped me off. He had a mistaken idea that you had a weakness for me and that I could worm out of you what evidence you'd dug up in the case." She lowered her gaze to her drink. "I told him different, but he didn't believe me."

"Well, you can square your gambling debt with him by telling him this—I'm out of the case."

"But I thought the judge appointed you to defend Smith!"

"He did. But someone's turned up with money for a lawyer. That means that the judge's order will be vacated, for Smith will no longer be an indigent prisoner."

Pat's dark eyes were eager. "Who's turned up? One of the boy's relatives?"

"I can't tell you that. You see—" Bodine stopped as Joan Wolf suddenly appeared at the booth.

"I must see you," she said. She shot a glance at Pat O'Neill. Pat's dark eyes flashed. She slid angrily from the booth.

"Sorry, Mr. Bodine. I didn't realize you had a date."

Bodine chuckled as she walked rapidly away, causing heads to turn, for she had never quite got over her chorus girl walk.

Joan Wolf said, "I'm sorry I got you into trouble. But I had to see you. I was told that you usually lunched here about this time."

"Well, sit down. You can eat whatever lunch Pat ordered."

Joan Wolf seated herself opposite him. "I want to apologize for the way I acted and for what I said. I've found out you're really on the level—that you mean to save Charlie."

"Oh, you did? And how did you find that out?"

"When I left your office I checked out of my hotel. Then the police arrested me. They took me to headquarters."

"Why?"

"Evidently they had been watching anybody that went into your office. They noticed my resemblance to my brother. But they didn't make either of us admit any relationship. If they had only known—I'd meant to announce my brother's real name. But when they tried to make me say Charlie was my brother, I balked. Charlie did a wonderful job at the police station of pretending he had never seen me before. But the police weren't fooled."

"They seldom are. What decided you that I wasn't in cahoots with them?"

Joan Wolf looked at him in surprise. "Why, it was obvious that they wouldn't have had to question me if you had been in their confidence! You would have phoned them about my visit."

"So now you're convinced that I'm on the level."

"I'm sure you are. And I'm sure you'll free him. I won't ask you to tell me why you took his case, but I just know you've found out something important."

Bodine smiled wryly. A waiter brought their lunches. Bodine ignored the food.

"Get this straight, Miss Wolf. I didn't take your brother's case because I thought I could help him. I thought he didn't have a prayer. But now I've good reason to believe that he was framed. I think the police believe he was framed. They're plenty scared I'll dig up something to prove it and create a scandal that will hurt a pay increase ordinance that's before the city council. And somebody else is scared."

"Who?"

"I can't tell you that. And I can't tell you why he is scared. I can guess, but I can't know."

"Isn't there any way you can find out?" She was childishly eager. Bodine found it hard to meet her eyes.

"There is if you can help me."

"I'll do anything!"

"That's fine. The first thing you can do is to pass up your lunch."

She smiled happily. "It wasn't my lunch anyway — I wouldn't have ordered such a lunch. The sooner I can help, the better."

"Good. Now, here's what you can do. Take this ten-dollar bill and go to the Moderne Supermarket. Buy groceries and take your time buying them."

Joan Wolf looked at her watch. "It's nearly one now. At home the stores close Wednesdays at one."

"They do here. That's why you'll have to pass up your lunch to get there. Tell the cab driver to hurry."

"But you said to take my time when I got there."

"That's right. Be the last one to leave. Be a nuisance. Make them call the manager to get rid of you."

"But—"

"Hurry!"

Trustingly the girl left the booth. Bodine looked after her, wondering at such blind faith. He shrugged to himself, left a bill for the waiter and used the rear entrance to get to the parking lot. He headed his convertible to the north side, toward Var-

ga's place. He found it slow going in the noon traffic, and he hoped that Joan Wolf would be able to make it to the Moderne Supermarket before it closed. His whole strategy depended on that.

IT WAS ten past one when he approached the Varga Club. He hoped that the delay had not thrown him behind schedule. Then something happened that upset all his plans. As he neared the club parking lot, he saw a low-slung convertible that was almost a carbon copy of his own car roar from the lot and turn in a skid down the boulevard ahead of him. There were two men and a girl in the car. The girl was Pat O'Neill. The male passenger was Mike Umanski. The driver was Lou Varga himself.

There was only one thing Bodine could do — gamble that Varga was heading for Miracle Drive, which crossed the boulevard a few blocks down and cut back toward the center of the city. The Moderne Supermarket was about half-way back. Miracle Drive was the quickest route. But Bodine couldn't risk trailing the other convertible. He braked suddenly, made a U-turn and put the automatic transmission in pick-up gear as he flattened the accelerator pedal. The car roared past slower-moving traffic, weaving in and out with horns sounding angrily in its wake. Bodine ignored the horns and the danger of a crash. He hoped a traffic cruiser would take note of him and follow. Something had gone radically wrong in his calculations.

He knew the city well enough to improvise a short-cut toward the Moderne Supermarket. Lou Varga and his passengers would beat him to his destination, but Bodine was sure he would not be too much later in arriving.

Varga's convertible was alone in the huge market parking lot as Bodine turned in, tires squealing. The tires squealed again as he brought the convertible to a halt alongside Varga's car. Pat O'Neill was its

lone occupant. Bodine took time to ask: "What are you doing, here, Pat?"

A frown brought lines to her forehead. "I came along for the ride. I was making my report to Varga when he got a call. He told me to come along with him and Mike."

Bodine felt a great sense of relief. "Sit tight, Pat, and keep out of this. What entrance did they use to get inside?"

"That door there—the one in the side marked 'Exit Only.'"

"Thanks."

Bodine knew that the door Pat had indicated would be securely locked, and that other doors would be locked too. The store was closed for the day. When Bodine glanced through its expanse of plate glass windows and doors, not a soul was in sight inside the building.

Bodine made his decision in a split-second. He got back under the wheel of the convertible, backed around and headed toward the street in front of the market. Suddenly he turned sharply and drove up the sidewalk. Again he wheeled sharply and sent the front of the convertible crashing into a section of plate glass. He ducked, braked as shattered glass fell all about him. He could hear Pat O'Neill's scream over the crashing of the glass. Unhurt, he leaped from the car, moved cautiously forward and through the gaping hole that he had cut.

He had gone only a few steps inside the market when a door opened. The tall, thin man who emerged stopped in his tracks, then turned and fled back through the doorway. He banged the door after him. Bodine sprinted to the door. He gathered up a metal pushcart on the way. He swung the end of the pushcart at the door's upper panel.

The gold letters saying *Office* were split as the heavy wheel-end of the cart struck them. Bodine swung twice more, smashing a hole in the panel. He threw aside the push cart and thrust a hand inside to work the lock. His wrist was caught as if in a

vice. He looked up to see the livid face of Mike Umanski. He screamed in spite of himself as his arm was twisted in a wrestler's grip.

"That's all, Mike!" commanded a voice—Varga's. Umanski held on to Bodine's wrist, however, as he unlocked the door and pulled it inward. He reached around and caught Bodine's other arm and dragged him inside. Bodine stared at the tableau presented.

Joan Wolf sat in the store manager's swivel chair, crudely taped to it. There was tape across her mouth. The tall, thin man, trembling hysterically, stood close by the girl. He was the excited man who had charged into Lou Varga's office that morning. Bodine was not surprised. The man was J. Herbert Atwood, the store manager.

Atwood turned in a shrill whine to Lou Varga. "Now what are we going to do? Now what have you got me into?"

Varga's eyes smoldered as he turned to the man.

"What have I got you into? This was your idea, holding this girl just because she came here and you recognized her as John Smith's sister. If I'd known you'd stuck your neck out with a kidnaping, I wouldn't have been suckered into coming here when you called." Varga turned to Bodine. "I swear I had nothing to do with this. The punk owes me money. Plenty. He thinks I've got to wet-nurse him because of it."

Bodine said, "Tell this gorilla to let go of me." Varga nodded, and Bodine was free. He rubbed his arm, ignoring Umanski and the trembling store manager.

HE SAID, "I'll buy the story that you aren't involved in this stupid piece of kidnaping or the killing of Kuntzman either. But the police won't buy it. They'll be crawling all over the place in a moment because of my car crashing into the glass out front. There's only one way out for you—tell the truth.

(Continued on page 111)



"Down, Leddie! Down on the floorboards!"

Powerful Crime Novelette

SELL-OUT!

WE HAD a lot of laughs in those days, and it seems to me we were laughing about something or other when we came out of this little run-down style shop tucked away in the hip pocket of Market Street.

It was my day off, and on top of that it

was just about a quarter after April, and the wind that came down Market Street smelled of Nagasaki gardens instead of old barnacles. The way I remember things, I'd just suggested that we stop at the first goat-sign and see whether bock beer still tasted better than the memory of it. And you'd

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By DANE GREGORY

No cop should ever promise his wife the beautiful things I promised Leddie—not when the money for them comes from Sammy Cosima—and the price is murder!

just said, "Oh, let's!" And on top of everything else, you were wearing the brand-new spring coat I'd bought you with the two or three thousand cigarettes I hadn't smoked that winter.

It looked all right, too. For twenty-one ninety-eight, it looked O. K. It was a sort of brownish worsted number with a plaid

effect that seemed to build up your eyes and hair, and I remember that the four leather buttons reminded me of caramel candy. There weren't any epaulettes on the shoulders, but you were carrying your shoulders as if there were. You said it was chic.

You said sometimes a person could get

the very *smartest* clothes at those little hole-in-the-wall places that didn't tack on the cost of the atmosphere. And I grinned at you and said, "Well, we might as well be hung for a sheep. Let's stop here and buy you a gardenia for your lapel."

The sheep business was only a joke, of course, because even a guy like me—a beat cop without too damn many prospects—could afford the five or ten cents a gardenia sets you back at one of those stalls. They're slightly stale ones that the big-time flower shops haven't been able to unload on the week-end carriage trade, and after they're out of the case so long they turn the color of old bananas. Well, that's all right. They're still dolled up with little silver ribbons, and when you first get them they smell like orchards in heaven.

So we stopped there, laughing a little, and I picked out a couple and paid for them; and I was all set to pin them on your lapel when this thing happened. You remember, maybe. I hope so, because I want you to know when and why it all began.

The car was a bullet-shaped gray Isotta with enough chrome on it to deafen the blind. It was doing about thirty, which is twice too much on that street at that time of day. It sailed right through a traffic light and passed so close to the cop on duty that he had to backstep to save his toes.

The cop's hat jumped into his hand, and he lifted it and waved at the red-headed girl behind the wheel. He'd been full of loud noises a minute before, but now he was grinning like a big, bashful kid that wants to please the new teacher.

The Isotta swerved in the middle of the street and aimed at the mucky yellow gutter-pool next to our feet. I don't know; maybe the girl wasn't trying to do it. But what does that part matter?

You caught a little surprised cry in the back of your throat and tried hard to get away in time. Your elbows took me in the ribs, and my big feet crushed the fallen gardenias. Then the water came at us like

a yellow plowshare, and for a moment or two after that I wasn't seeing anything.

Half-crying, you dunked a little handkerchief onto your coat-front and said: "It isn't really hurt, though. Not a bit. It'll wash right out."

I didn't say anything.

You said, "Don't be that way, Ernie. It's all right—honest. Not hurt a bit."

I was still looking after the car and the girl, whose silver-fox whipped across her shoulder. I knew both the car and the girl. They belonged to a guy named Sammy Cosima, who had sat right across from me in six-A. He was kicked out of school for doing something I wouldn't want you to know about.

The girl's name was Katherine Cooley, and Sammy had found her at the gates of a reformatory where she'd just wrapped up her second bit for lush-rolling.

You said, "*Don't* look that way, Ernie! You can afford another gardenia, and—and the coat'll wash out, I tell you."

It wouldn't, though.

You can wash out a new coat, but you can't wash a moment so that it ever looks the same again. Well, that had been ours—we had what we wanted, and we could throw our laughs around because there were plenty more where those came from—and then all at once the moment was gone. I don't know: something dirty had happened to it, that was all. There wasn't anything we could do about it....

SAMMY COSIMA looked at me. "Twenty a week," he said finally.

I said, "Thirty."

The redhead shook her long hair so that it danced like snakes. "Hear him talk. Just *hear* him talk, Sam."

I opened the hammered silver box on the desk and looked at the cigars inside. I put four of them in my breast pocket and snapped the end off a fifth one with my teeth. I spat it out just where I meant to—in the redhead's lap.

"I couldn't go back on the other boys in the thirty-every-Thursday club," I said. "Maybe you remember something about me, Sam. I used to get gold stars in arithmetic at the old Jefferson school. I know what it's worth to you to have your policy runners working my district."

So did Cosima. Cosima had to know everything, because he was climbing the rainbow; he was building to something big. Everybody else thought so, too, and that noise you heard was the sound of politicians fighting for a handgrip on Cosima's Porterhouse special.

Well, my precinct ran through Chinatown, so Cosima wanted me bad. An old lady had written in to a newspaper complaining that the Chinese *gambled* down there, and pretty soon lots of old ladies were writing in about it, and finally there was nothing for the D. A.'s office to do but shut up all the lottery houses and *gomoku* parlors in the district. That left plenty of room for Cosima's operatives, and he was all set to teach the Oriental mind Ethiopian pool.

He said, "I remember you, all right. You used to be a pretty reasonable sort of kid, Ernie."

I said, "The boy grew older."

The redhead gave out laughter that was like icicles rattling in the wind. She said, "Sometimes a boy can grow colder, too."

Cosima got up quietly and hit her in the mouth. The girl held her fingers across the bruise, and everything about her seemed to shrink but her eyes. They were wide and shiny like the eyes of a cat in a doghouse.

Cosima said, "We don't make threats around here," and then sat down slowly.

That was how he did everything—in a smooth, quiet way like a motor just off the assembly line. He wasn't a "dese, dose and dem" guy; he'd never been that, not even in Miss Mosely's sixth grade. He wouldn't have passed for a hoodlum, and there was nothing dark or oily about his skin. He was just a small, sure man with colorless eyes

and a body that might have been custom-built for his bones.

He said, "So you're planning to ride my shoulders, are you? Why? A week ago you were a strictly legitimate cop."

I got up. "You probably don't know much about symbolism, Sam, but it has something to do with two crushed gardenias and some mud on my wife's coat. I *am* riding your shoulders, by the way."

"Are you, Ernie?"

"To the top of the hill," I said. "You're going to branch out, they tell me. Now it's policy numbers, and later it's telephone numbers, and still later it's every quiet noise in town. Well, Sam, there're going to be plenty of times when you'll need a tough cop whose shoulders you can ride. And the bigger the shoulders, the better the ride. Think that one over, will you?"

He was thinking it over back of his eyes. "I've always liked you, Ernie, but I wonder how far anybody can trust a plaster saint that tips over in the first breeze."

I laughed. "You can trust me like a brother, and I don't mean your brother Ed. Give me a chance and see for yourself."

"I'll do it. I'll just do that little thing. Meanwhile, I'll pay you your thirty a—"

I said, "The price has gone up five dollars in the last three minutes. I've decided to buy Leddie a silver-fox scarf that will fly back over her shoulder when she drives our new car."

CHAPTER TWO

"Rings on My Fingers . . ."

YOU touched it with cautious fingers as if there might still be life behind the little yellow-glass eyes. I said, "It won't snap at you. They took out all the teeth and put 'em in the bill."

You said, "But—but we can't afford this, Ernie. We just can't."

"That's what you told me when we started having steak and mushrooms every

other day, but there's still a noise in the pig-bank, isn't there?"

You said, "But, Ernie—" and then your eyes told me that you knew. We looked at each other across a gap in time, and finally I turned away and went to the window. I can even remember the pale shine of lights on the wet black street.

"Well," I said, "there are three kinds of cops. There's the kind that walk backward, and the kind that stand still, and the kind that take the quick way there. . . . It won't touch *you*, Laddie—and it won't touch our kids if we have any."

"It will! It *has*. You've been changing right in front of my eyes. . . . Ernie, let's not do it. I can't explain things very well, but there's—there's only so much fun to a person, and when you steal fun out of the—"

I said, "My dad used to talk like that when he was a cop. Then a bullet took his optic nerve away, and he sat in the dark and dreamed of the fun he hadn't seen. Sometimes my mother would take down the silver cup he'd got for being a good cop; and she'd whisper, 'But *feel* it, Dan. Just *feel* it.'"

"Ernie! Oh, Ernie . . ."

I turned around suddenly and tied you up in my arms. "Put on your hat, good-looking. We're going down-town and buy you some dollar-eighty gardenias like Katherine Cooley wears. . . . It won't touch you, Laddie. I swear it won't touch you."

We stood there with our hearts close together, and your mouth tasted like salt-water taffy; but I liked the way the silver-fox nudged at my throat. . . .

All the boys said, "How does he do it?" but they knew. They knew, all right. Some of the old, gray, stay-where-I-am ones ran the drinking fountain too long after I'd taken a drink, and there are always plenty of those to every smart cop with a price-tag in his eyes. Well, that was O. K.

I had my friends. I had friends like Swoboda and Grieg and Hutchins, the smart ones who liked the idea of a Japanese tum-

bling act and were figuring to ride my shoulders while I rode Cosima's. I kept them friendly, too, because even a cop never knows when he might need some cops on his side.

From blues to mufti is just a short haul if you take the quick way. Cosima was getting big; he was half-way up the rainbow; his floating crap game was now a gambling float and he owned a lot of places that Cosima called escort bureaus. He had his wires out all over town, and there were plenty of stool-pigeons warming their feet on those wires.

He said, "Are you still with me, Ernie?" and I said, "Yeah, but I wish you'd grow more fat on your shoulders," and then both of us laughed.

So I brought in Little Boy Ballou, a phone-booth shaker who made the bad mistake of thinking he was ready for bigger boxes. I brought in a professional maque named Parson Peavey who made the worse mistake of slapping down Cosima's brother Ed. I brought in a couple of juju peddlers Katherine Cooley didn't like oh-just-because, and the papers said: **DOPE RING SMASHED!**

I WENT to Safe and Lofts—detective third grade—while Swoboda took over my old prowl. But four-fifths of the protection money still went into my new Harris tweeds, and Swoboda was too wise to cry howcome. Everybody knew that Sammy and I were just like this. Sammy's brother Ed was only one of the little scavenger-birds that follow a whale. "And a man," said Cosima, "needs another man he can talk to."

I hummed, "This is the way we go to town, go to town, tum-te-tum," and Sammy's eyes smiled a little above their blue-gray benzedrine pouches. He was taking lots of benzedrine lately, because a man in Sammy's position had to do most of his dreaming while he was wide-awake.

"You're all right, Ernie. You're going

to be Chief of Police some day—did you know that?”

“I knew it before you did. They say you own the commissioner now, but have you ever looked into the commissioner’s eyes?”

“Guilfoyle’s? Why?”

I said, “He’s got an optical defect known as politician’s orb. Right now he sees ten-spots in front of his eyes, but when the papers start screaming, he’ll see night-spots instead. And you’re going to need a tough police chief to handle him then. Better build me up a little faster, Sammy, but don’t tell Guilfoyle why.”

So Sammy built me up a little faster, and Swoboda and Grieg and Hutchins walked in a shadow that was growing longer every day.

It’s a very short haul to Homicide if you take the quick way. And a Homicide cop may only be as good as his last case, but who remembers the bluecoat that picks up a kid for stealing grapes? Anyhow, I got by. With Sammy Cosima back of me, it was raining forget-me-nots.

I solved the Veer thing, remember? Veer’s alibi turned out to be no good because he’d bought it from three men who were friends of Cosima’s, and so I solved the case. And there was the little pale barber who threw a door-stop at his wife’s boy-friend and then called up the wrong attorney—Sammy Cosima’s. I shot the barber in the leg and brought him in.

And then I was just like Lydia Pinkham—the papers all published my face...

The *Herald* whispered out of your fingers and made a little drunken tent on the floor. “Anyhow,” you said, “I’m glad you gave them one of your earlier pictures. Ernie, did you *have* to shoot him in the leg?”

I said, “You’ve read the papers, haven’t you? They say he was a desperate criminal.”

“Yes. Did you shoot him in the leg because he was a desperate criminal, or was he a desperate criminal because you shot him in the leg?”

I said, “Know what I’m going to do, honey? I’m going to buy you a string of matched pearls the size of Oklahoma peanuts. How would you like that, hey?”

You looked down at your small, still hands and said: “I think I’d like it, Ernie. They might remind me of the peanut-whistles at Playland and the songs we danced to when you didn’t have such big hollows under your eyes. . . .”

Joe Glaumer came to town, a shiny fat man whose grease had melted into his eyes so that they rolled around like wet taws.

A reform wave lifted him out of Chicago and washed him right up to our door, and it looked as if he was going to camp there. He said he was only seeing the sights, but he spent too much time looking at Cosima’s night-spots and his policy business and his brand-new necklace of gambling halls.

“Besides,” said Cosima, “he has a bad reputation, and it’s up to us to keep this city wholesome.”

I looked down at my hands and saw sweat there. “Don’t say *us*, Sammy. Not if you mean what I think you mean.”

Cosima laughed. “You’ll string along, Lieutenant, whatever I mean. When a man gets in deep enough, his own weight pulls him the rest of the way.”

Ed Cosima laughed, a pale snigger that tried to sound like the noise Sammy had made. And the redhead laughed, too, though her laughs were far between, these days. Sammy frequently stayed out till dawn and came home whistling that song about the strawberry blonde.

I WENT away from there, not laughing; and late that afternoon Glaumer passed in his time-card.

He was standing on a shady street-corner near the Park when a gray-faced man with nailhead eyes walked up and shot him five times and walked away.

His hand had been in his pocket when he died, and down at the M. E.’s office it took three men and a boy to pry his lucky gold-

piece loose from the poor guy's fingers.

But there was nothing funny about it; nothing at all. A pair of newlyweds in a nearby flat had seen far too much of the killing. They went through goon gallery and identified the gray-faced man as one Vic Paravacini, a junkie known to be an old family retainer of the Cosimas. Things were bad.

"Yes, they are," said Sammy. "Hereafter I'll handle the heavy work myself—or leave it to you, maybe?"

I said, "There's liable to be a lot of it hereafter. The boys are beating the streets for Paravacini this very minute, and what do you suppose will happen when they bring him in?"

"He'll tell idle tales. He'll spread malicious gossip."

"Right."

Cosima took a benzedrine tablet and washed it down with rock-and-rye. "These things are supposed to boost your I. Q. ten per cent, so I'm forty per cent smarter than the average man today."

"You could take one more tablet and you'd still only be half as smart. What are you going to do?"

Cosima smiled faintly. Cosima said why, he was a law-abiding citizen and was going to turn Paravacini over to Homicide, that was all. "Is your thirty-eight in good working condition, Ernie? Did you clean it out well after you shot the barber in the leg?"

I waited.

Cosima said, "Vic will be expecting you. He knows you're my cop, and I told him you'd be over with a bundle of stuff from drawer three. You'll find him holed up at . . ." He named the address.

I said, "So it's that way."

I went to the window and looked out, wanting the taste of air.

Lights strung their glimmer through the dusk and down there was doll-town, a street of little marching toys that would crackle toy newspapers and read the story over toy breakfast tables tomorrow. I said, "So the

old family retainer has to come in dead. Well, why can't we send Swoboda or Grieg or Hutchins?"

"They're not on Homicide. You are."

"And that means I've got to be homicidal?"

"Now, Ernie, I didn't express it that way. But you want rings on your fingers, don't you? You want pretty clothes for your wife? You want to be Chief of Police some day? Well, then. Ernie boy, this isn't any game where you can walk right in and turn around and walk right out again."

I put on my hat.

I went outside.

I took a cab to a broken-arched rooming house on Oriental Way.

There was a record that my father and mother used to play on a squeaky gramophone years ago; and that was the song my brain kept humming when I went up those dark stairs to kill Paravacini.

*For I've got rings on my fingers, bells on
my toes.
Elephants to ride upon, my lee-tul Irish Rose.*

The hall was in shadow. I took out my gun. Behind that door Paravacini would be waiting, a shrunken gray man who had thought he could play cards with giants.

*Wow! Come to your nabob, and on Saint
Patrick's Day.
Be-e-e Mistress Mumbo-Jumbo-Jibbajoo Jay
O'Shay!*

I threw open the door and stepped inside.

CHAPTER THREE

Cosima's Desk Draw

YOU said, "Three times. Three times you shot him. Oh, Ernie, Ernie, I hoped there wouldn't ever have to be a man's life blood on your fingers!"

I said, "It'll wash out," and wondered for half a second where I'd heard the phrase before. "He was a killer, wasn't he? And a hophead, wasn't he? And I'll soon be drawing a captain's salary, won't I? Think

'it over, Tinklebell—it ain't exactly hay."

"I wish it was. Then I could make a hula skirt out of it and not feel quite so naked when we meet the people who used to be our friends."

"Oh, so you feel that way, do you? Well, slide under your bonnet, good-looking—we'll go right down and buy you some new glad rags."

And you put your face in your hands and jerked with laughter. "Glad rags?" you said. . . .

Things were boiling. "There's talk," said Sammy Cosima. "Ernie, I'm afraid you haven't learned how to win friends and influence people. Some of the other boys on the force don't like seeing you in a captain's chair."

I said, "Well, Swoboda and Grieg and Hutchins are satisfied. Let the rest of 'em look the other way."

"They're doing that already, I hear, when you speak to them on the street. And they're also talking to reporters, Ernie boy. I hate to sully my lips with the words, but they're saying you're the first gunman in history who was ever knighted by the taxpayers for cooling off a possible state's witness."

I went to the window and looked out, wanting air again. Dolltown shimmered in the early light, and a doll with nicely whittled legs created a miniature sensation as she boarded a trolley. I said, "Well, so what? The daily news, that isn't published in this town would fill a sheet big enough to wrap Paul Bunyan's lunch in."

Sammy agreed. The big trouble was, said Sammy, Commissioner Guilfoyle had been listening to some of the news that wasn't fit to print. "And he remembers the Seabury investigation. You were right about Guilfoyle, Ernie—he's beginning to see those night-spots in front of his eyes."

I said, "Well?"

"Ever meet the commissioner's twenty-year-old son? A nice kid, Ernie, but something like his father—enough room for a

breakfast nook between his ears. And it just so happens that he and Katherine have a date tonight. Katherine is going to show him some Japanese prints and a new cocktail recipe. First you pour in the bacardi, and then you—"

"Pour in the chloral, and then you take some pictures his old man wouldn't want advertised."

Cosima made his faint smile and hummed a few notes of the tune about the strawberry blonde. "Well, something like that, maybe."

I remembered the smile and the song later, when Katherine Cooley's body was found.

There were two .38 bullets in her heart, and she had died with her red-tipped fingers tight around nothing. But her face was almost pretty again, as if death had returned all the things that life had taken.

The electric phonograph in her apartment kept reversing the stack of records and playing *It Makes No Difference Now*. It made no difference now that she had once driven an Isotta and splashed mud all over your cheap little coat, Leddie.

I went to Cosima's office in the Barr Building. Cosima was looking at something in the top drawer of his desk; when I stepped inside he palmed the drawer shut and raised his colorless eyes. "Well, Ernie?"

MY FINGERS loosened around the .38 in my pocket. I had thought for a moment I was going to kill him, but a moment never lasts very long, does it, Leddie? I said, "So you used a gun instead of a Graflex, did you?"

"It had to be done, Ernie boy."

"You're talking to a cop," I said.

"I'm talking to a guy that butters his popcorn, and both of us know it. It had to be done, Ernie—she could have made trouble for everyone. And—well, the commissioner's kid thought he was a sort of Junior G-Man, so he carried a .38 in the side-pocket of his car. The slugs in Kath-

erine will match that .38, and I want you to make damn sure the ballistics boys don't mislay 'em."

I went to the window again. "You've got the gun?"

"Yeah. It's registered in the kid's name and there's a very nice set of latents."

The air was full of fog that day, but it tasted good just the same. I couldn't get enough of it. I said, "It's too raw, Sammy. Remember the Vivian Gordon case in New York City? This afternoon every sheet in town will be rattling the cup."

Cosima said why, what gave me that idea? "It looks like a burglary, don't it? And it'll keep right on looking that way until Guilfoyle gets out of control. Which won't be soon, Ernie. He knows the score, and he and his son are two very sick men this morning."

Down there a newspaper turned over and over in the wind, carrying its cargo of dead events toward a trash receptacle. *Little marching dolls, how many of you remember the man who killed Vic Paravacini and shot a pale barber in the leg?*

I said, "It's still too raw. Everybody in the department will know you took the easy way of blowing out an old flame."

"Oh, I've got an iron-clad alibi."

I turned around and went over to the desk. "An alibi?"

"I was with Commissioner Guilfoyle when it happened. So were you. Tell the society editors that Guilfoyle and I enjoyed dainty refreshments at your place last night."

Oh, you're good, Sammy. It isn't every guy that can frame a police commissioner's son and force the commissioner to give him an alibi.

Cosima opened his desk and took out a squat brown bottle with lemon peels and slabs of rock candy in it. "Don't let it throw you, Ernie. How about a drink?"

I said, "Not that stuff. I don't even like it on my pancakes. Haven't you got any honest drinking-liquor around here?"

"Oh, sure. Sure."

He went into the lounge room to get me a bottle of scotch, and while he was gone I pulled out the top drawer and looked at the thing he'd been interested in when I first arrived. It interested me.

Sometimes there are little broken instants when a man can make his final choice between two ways of life. Well, this was one of them, Leddie; and I made my choice.

"What's that song you're whistling, anyhow?" Cosima asked me when he came back with the scotch. "Hm-te-hmm-hmm—it's kind of catchy, at that."

"Isn't it?" I said. "My folks used to get a big bang out of it in the old days before a gangster's bullet blinded my father. It's just an ancient jitterburg piece about a guy named Mumbo-Jumbo-Jibbajoo O'Shay."

CHAPTER FOUR

Closing Time

YOU said, "What's the matter, Ernie? You used to love steak and mushroom rooms when we could only afford to have them Saturday nights."

I said, "Oh, I was just thinking. Leddie kid, we'll get out of all this some day. I want to be Chief of Police for a while, of course, but—well, there might be more money in other things. The night club game, for instance."

You said, "Oh."

"Oh, what?"

"Just oh."

I said, "Uh—by the way, Leddie, there's been a little trouble, and—well, if anybody should happen to ask you, Sam Cosima and the police commissioner were here from six o'clock until three last night. . . . Know what I bought you today, kid? Some platinum slave bangles with genuine—"

"Oh."

"Oh, what?"

"Oh, God, Ernie."

From a prowl in the goat district to the

office of Chief—it's a short enough haul if you take the quick way.

One July afternoon grizzled old Chief Tom Strahan went out into his garden patch to weed the onions, and the temperature stopped a heart that a good many bullets had missed. He was buried with due official honors; and the next afternoon Commissioner Guilfoyle told the newshawks that he "deemed it fitting to—*hrrum*—fill the vacancy with a man who has come up the hard way and has repeatedly distinguished himself by bravery under fire."

The newshawks kept their faces straight and handed in their stories. The *Herald* said in a front page box: "Though the *Herald* endorses the seniority system and would have preferred the appointment of a more seasoned man, it reserves all comment until it has seen what the new Chief can do about the vice, gambling and general moral turpitude now known to be flourishing in this city."

"I knew you'd make it, Ernie old boy," said Swoboda. So did Grieg, and Hutchins.

But Sammy Cosima was like the kid in the story—rather more surprised than pleased.

He came into the commissioner's office with his brother Ed, still one of the little scavenger-birds that follow a whale. Sammy Cosima wasn't smiling, and Ed Cosima was doing his best not to smile in the same way. He hadn't the face for it, though; it was just another of those empty poolroom faces that look as if they would melt like wax in the sunlight.

Sammy said, "I hadn't authorized that appointment, Guilfoyle."

I laughed.

Guilfoyle slumped over his desk and stared into his inkwell like a myopic old swami trying to read the future. He was a mighty important guy at party luncheons, but now his pink face had a sick, pulled-apart look and you knew he was really just a tired fat man torn by the lean and hungry. He said, "Well, it was sort of—understood

from the first, Sam. A matter of time."

Sammy and Ed sat down.

Sammy said, "The appointment is hereby null and void. I've been keeping an eye on Ernie lately, and he looks to me like a guy who is getting just a little bit too big for his pants."

I laughed again.

I got up and touched the commissioner's desk-set lighter to one of the commissioner's cigars. "That," I said, "is just another way of saying that the pants were too small for me. You never expected me to be Chief, did you? You just wanted a performing cop who would commit semi-official murders for you. But what Guilfoyle means is that I authorized the appointment."

IT WAS the moment when all hole cards were going to be turned up. Both of us had known from the first it was coming sooner or later, because we had hated each other from the first. All the time we had hated each other with the sick, slimy hate of men who are leaning on each other's shoulders across a world of hatred.

I'd never forgotten that a bullet from the gun of Sammy's old man had cost my father his eyes.

Sammy had never forgotten that a bullet from my father's gun had put his old man on a slab in the morgue.

That was how it was; and this was it.

Sammy said, "I've still got that gun, Guilfoyle, and I can find plenty of cops who'll play ball with me if I say so. You're putting your kid's tail in a split stick. I can't wait to hear him yelp."

I laughed for the third time, and then I went over to Sammy and hit him once for each laugh. I hit him three times across the mouth, remembering how he'd once hit Katherine Cooley. His lips broke under my knuckles, but there wasn't any change of color in his eyes.

I said, "You made one mistake, Sammy. Lots of cops carry a jimmy, and there was a jimmy in my pocket that afternoon when

you had the kid's gun locked up in your desk drawer. So you haven't got *the* thirty-eight any more. All you've got is the rod I used on Vic Paravacini—and Guilfoyle now takes his orders from me."

Sammy looked at Guilfoyle's face and knew it was true. He said slowly: "All right, Ernie, that's one for you. What happens now?"

"You're out, that's all. I'm in." I said it very softly.

"In?" said Sammy.

"I mean that every racket in town is going to be closed up for a month or so pending a change in ownership. Policy, clip-joints, call-joints—the works, Sammy. Then I'll ease quietly out of office and Guilfoyle will appoint a trained seal to replace me. Swoboda or Grieg or Hutchins, maybe. And then I'll take over where you left off."

I pushed cigar smoke into Cosima's face. "I'm going to do what Joe Glaumer only thought he was going to do. My runners will handle the policy business you built for me. My tin horns will operate the wheels you were nice enough to gaff for me. I'll control the taxi-dance halls and the Glamour Escort Service, Sammy. From Eyesore Avenue to Snob Hill, there's not a racket in town I haven't earmarked."

Cosima got up and put a small hand in either patch-pocket of his coat. He was still bleeding around the mouth, but not a muscle twitched in his face. "You'll never make the grade, Ernie boy. A crooked cop is still a little guy no matter whose pants he wears, but I don't want even any small-time competition in my town."

I grinned at him. "And I don't, either. That's why you and your brother Ed are going to the Rock, Sammy."

Ed Cosima cupped gray hands over his mouth and wheedled into them like a sick trumpet into a derby hat. "Not the Rock, Sam! He can't do that, can he? I couldn't stand the Rock, Sam!"

I said, "You haven't been keeping all this business in your heads, boys. It's too big

for a couple of guys that never drew a passing grade in arithmetic. You've got business records hidden out somewhere, and those records will give both of you a free boat-ride to Alcatraz. Uncle Sam is pretty touchy these days about income tax violations."

Sammy Cosima made his faint smile. "I only wish you had a couple-three kids, Ernie, but I know how much you think of your wife. See what I mean? From now on you and your wife are as good as—"

I hit him again—a little harder this time. I threw him backward into the wall, and I said: "I think of everything, Sammy. All right, boys—you can come in now!"

The door jumped open.

"Yessis, yessir, yessir," said Swoboda, and Grieg, and Hutchins.

I SAID, "They're yours, boys—and God pity all three of you if any mouthpiece springs a *habeas*! I don't think there's a lawyer in town that knows the score, but crowd 'em along from precinct to precinct just in case."

They said it again.

"And meanwhile," I told them, "keep working on Ed. Trot out those rubber hoses we used on Frankenstein's monster and make him think it's pledge week in hell. I've got to know where they kept the ledgers, see? You wouldn't be able to dent Sammy on account of he's a tough guy like me, but Ed will break like a breadstick if you handle him the right way."

"Yessir," they said.

"And call me at the house when you've got joyous tidings for me. That's all."

They said I could depend on them, Ernie old boy; and Sammy and Ed Cosima went out of there with gyves upon their wrists.

I grinned at Guilfoyle. "Don't let it throw you, Commissioner—it's just Horatio Alger in an ape suit. And don't ever forget that you helped make the politics that helped make the man. Be seeing you, Commish."

I opened the door and went over to my

brand-new office with my pockets full of his cigars.

I sat down and picked up the handset.

I called the precinct captains.

They bulged the walls of the office a half hour later—uncertain old cops and too-certain young ones; square cops who hated me for what I was and crooked ones who hated me for what they weren't. And cops who were just ordinary guys, not above a little two-penny graft but still not ready to sell out all the way.

I passed around the commissioner's cigars and started my talk.

"Boys," I told them, "the *Herald* says there's moral turpitude in this town, and I guess we can all smell it even if we can't spell it. So tonight each and every one of you is going to be Queen of the May. The by-word is: Throw the rascals in! We're cracking down on Cosima's empire."

Nobody said a word.

I hit the desk-top hard. "This is no gag for the newspapers—I mean every damn word of it. The harbor cops will take care of Sammy's gambling float, and the rest of you will take care of everything else. Everything—get it? We may have to build an annex on the jail, but tomorrow morning I want every hood in town in the jug."

Somebody said hollowly, "G-gamblers, too?" I—I mean—*everybody*?"

"You heard me. Claggett, Cosima owns a piece of the Rialto, so tell your men to put on smoked glasses and raid that art show that's drawing so many baldheaded art critics. . . . And the rest of you—well, you all know the addresses. Your boys can break as many heads as they want to, but tell them not to use their crowbars on any of the equipment, see? Now get the hell out and go to work!"

Old Man O'Toole was the last one to leave. He came slowly toward me, rolling his gift cigar between two big hands. "You know, Ernest," he said huskily, "for half a second, there, I thought I was looking into your father's face."

"Did you, Dan?"

"Yes. But not when you told the boys to save the equipment."

He tore the cigar into two pieces and threw the pieces in my face.

CHAPTER FIVE

You Shall Have Music

YOU said, "Phone call for you, Ernie," and I grinned and picked up the transmitter.

"Swoboda?" I said.

"Yessir, Chief. Talk a little louder, will you? I'm still kind of deaf from listening to Ed Cosima sing."

"All right. Where's the stuff?"

"About ten miles west of town on Highway Three. Sammy's got a little camp there where he sometimes makes waffles for a strawberry blonde. Striped rubberoid roof and an old paint job. There's a rock chimney running up the side wall and a rock wishing-well out in front."

"The ledgers are there?"

"Everything, Chief—yessir. And no caretaker."

"All right, Swoboda. Hang on to the Cosimas, though, and you might give Sammy a fast workout or two just to keep your hand in."

I dropped the transmitter and put on my hat.

"Business?" you said.

"Yeah, but it won't take very long. Look, Tinklebell, how would you like to come along with me? We haven't gone for a nice moonlight ride since—well, I guess it was before they moved the Land of Nod to Hollywood."

"Why, I'd love it, Ernie. Where's my little beret? I'd just love it."

This was the month of July, you know, and the night was full of summer—not only the new green summer but the ghosts of all green ones gone. The world smelled of Nagasaki gardens again, and there was a low singing under the surface of things; and

there was a deeper singing under our feet as the Daimler ate up Highway Three.

It was a new sedan, and a good one. It was the kind of car that small kids touch with unbelieving fingers as if they expect the paint job to crack like a dream. I hung onto the wheel and let her out, loving the taste of wind.

"It's a nice evening, isn't it, Ernie?" you said.

"It's the evening to end all evenings," I told you. And then: "We'll have to do this often, kid. Look, Leddie, I'm getting out of the cop business pretty soon. I know you haven't—well, liked everything—but I'm getting out soon."

"Night clubs?" you said.

"Why say it in that tone of voice? There's money in night clubs, isn't there?" And then I knew there was no use trying to kid you or myself. "All right, Leddie. It's going to be a dirty business. It's all been dirty—right from the very first. But a man's business life is something that doesn't have to muck up his family. It's like some guy used to say in my school English book—a man's life is sort of a thing apart."

"It was the poet Byron, Ernie. They named a collar after him, but he didn't die very happy."

I said, "Well, look. I'm not exactly a daffodil, but the only way I can explain it is just as one woman to another. Ever notice that no matter how rotten a housekeeper a woman is, she likes to have one room that's always swept clean and has nice things in it?"

"Yes, Ernie, I have."

"Well, that's like my life. It's dirty now, Leddie—I guess it's dirtier than I ever expected it to be. It grew on me like a disease, sort of. But there's one clean room, Leddie, and you're that room and all the nice things inside it. The lace window curtains and the new piano. . . . I couldn't get along without you, kid. The rest of the house—well, that's only what the O'Tooles and the Cosimas see."

You were quiet for a moment, and then I heard you crying softly into the wind. "That's . . . nice, Ernie. It sounds better than Byron to me. But just among us girls, if you leave the door open long enough some of the dirt always manages to creep in."

"Don't cry, Leddie. Look, kid—look at the moonlight coming at us."

IT CAME in through the air-vents and crumbled up in your hair. Highway Three reached straight and clean ahead of us, and the trees were old men running to catch a train. Crickets piped everywhere—maybe getting pretty hungry for the bread crumbs I used to feed them when I was a kid.

There were a thousand uncollected laughs in the night; and I said: "When I've taken care of this little job we'll cruise out to Playland and see if we can still throw our feet around in the same old way."

And you said, "Don't look now, but isn't there somebody behind us, Ernie?"

And I said, "Yes," and all at once I was sick and afraid. It was as if everything had blown apart inside me and left only the taste of my own rottenness in my throat. Everything: the moon and the night and the thousand laughs that the night had decided not to pay.

Because I knew the meaning of that sound behind us. It was the fat, expensive growl of Sam Cosima's Isotta, and it was close.

Swoboda and Grieg and Hutchins. The little guys sell out to the bigger ones, and the bigger ones seldom stop to think that a man who can be had once can be had again. Again, again and again. And that's why all the giants go down; because they've forgotten the rules they lived by when they were midgets themselves.

The Thompson went *huppety-hup-hup-hup like a drunk belching into a glass*.

I yelled, "Down, Leddie! Down on the floorboards! I swore it wouldn't touch you—and by God it won't! I won't let it!"

Sell-Out!

The Daimler rose up under my foot and sang like a bass-throated bird over the macadam. Everything melted.

All the night melted up into nothing and poured past us in a *who-o-o* of wind. Then the nothing would melt; the trees would break apart in sudden blasts of light so that houses threw themselves at us like a kid's tumbled blocks—like doll-houses, maybe; like doll-houses full of trivial happy dolls who were popping popcorn, or playing rummy, or listening to the radio news that a giant had made that afternoon.

Then the sub-gun would be talking again.

And it would be saying *rackety-rac-rac-rac*, and it would be close enough now so that it was like lots of drunks: so that it was like wooden hammers beating, and girls screaming at their boy-friends, and everybody wearing those funny, funny hats on New Year's Eve at the Till-Two Club.

I bawled, "Down, Leddie! Damn it, I said *down!*"

"But, Ernie! Up ahead of us! *Ahead of us!*"

I had seen it, Leddie. It was just that I couldn't really believe in it for a heart-beat or two.

It was so big, you know. It was bigger than all outdoors. It was a Mack truck laid end for end across the highway, solid and terrible as the wall between life and death. Probably Sammy had just had a benzedrine tablet when he thought of that.

The Daimler screamed like a horse. I fought with the wheel and we went around in a U-turn.

We made it. It was like having your head out in space and your body trying frantically to catch up, but we made it. The enormous owl-eyes of Sammy's Isotta burst at us out of the shadows ahead; and I stepped on the gas again.

I shouted: "Loosen up, Leddie! Loosen your muscies! Just let yourself go!"

"No, Ernie! No!"

"We've gotta hit 'em! It's our only out!"

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Dane Gregory

They'd cut us down with the gun if— You'll
be all right, Laddie! We're going to—"

We hit.

Sammy tried to swerve in the last sec-
ond, but we hit.

The world snuffed out in glass and dark-
ness.

THEN there was moonlight cutting the
darkness, and then I was crawling
through the moonlight with pebbles in one
hand and a monkey wrench in the other.
I didn't even know where the monkey
wrench had come from.

Inside the hash of the Isotta, somebody
cried out a woman's name and then put the
woman away forever. It was the voice of
Ed Cosima, no longer trying to sound like
his brother.

Sammy's small, clean face came slowly
toward me above the dark drum of the
Thompson. Sammy's new suit was some-
thing a fastidious scarecrow would never
have worn, but nothing seemed to have hap-
pened to the face under the hat. It said,
"Well, we were both tough boys, weren't
we, Ernie boy?"

Then Sammy dropped the gun and leaned
over from the hips and lay down on the
highway. He was dead.

I called, "They're taken care of, Laddie!
Where are you, Laddie?"

And I padded along the soft shoulder of
the road and there you were.

You were lying there with your face in
the dust, and your brown hair was spread
in the dust, and one of your hands moved
in the dust. With the moonlight powder-
ing your loose hair, it was like a doll's hair
in the dust.

I sat down beside you and laughed once
and pulled you into my arms.

I said, "Everything's going to be all right,
Laddie."

I said, "Laddie. . . ."

But I guess I'd known the score from the
first, and I guess you had, too. Even when

Sell-Out!

your hand moved in the dust, I guess we were both just trying to keep things from me a little while longer. . . .

There will be a lot of people, Leddie dear, for I am a very important face on all the front pages of the papers. I am Mumbo-Jumbo-Jibhajoo Jay O'Shay, the guy who cleaned up a city single-handed and spurred organized crime to a vicious mid-night reprisal.

There will be a lot of people at the church, darling, and you shall have beautiful music; but not the music of peanut whistles at Playland or the songs that wove a net for our feet when we were young.

There will be a lot of people at the service, dearest, and they will wonder why you are wearing the little brown coat that couldn't have been much of a coat even when it was new. But you and I understand, don't we, Leddie? We know it was really the last thing I ever gave you.

THE END

Death Rehearsal

(Continued from page 33)

McGrath had said it would be one murderer dead and another to take his place. Willie's finger was tightening and suddenly he knew. McGrath was right. It wasn't only Joe's head he was firing that bullet into. It was also his own head. He was McGrath's other murderer. But it was too late to think now. . . .

Willie Bloto walked up the few steps between the two green lights and into the cop house. It was a little late to talk now, but McGrath wanted it that way. He went straight up to the desk and said to the sergeant on duty.

"I want to report a killing."

"Yeah—?" the sergeant looked up sharply. "You just killed someone?"

"Not quite," Willie Bloto grinned. "This murder took place three years ago. To my friend Frankie. You see . . ."

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110

Larry Holden

(Continued from page 58)

in the Gulf and come back to the beach where Nora found it. Honest, Gil, I wouldn't hurt you or . . ."

A sweep of light cut across the windows, heralding an approaching car, and Vince sprang for the shotgun on the wall.

"Well!" he said with a curious kind of satisfaction. "Here comes Hardee and his All-American boys."

He wrenched open the door and sprang outside. His shotgun roared, and the approaching car swerved.

"I'm the one you want, Hardee!" Vince bellowed. "I killed Lloyd King. Come and get me—if you can!"

He gave a great guffaw and raced around the shack, and Gil heard the splashes as he hit the lake. Hardee's voice was shrill as he whipped his reluctant deputies on. They didn't like the idea of the shotgun. Their footsteps pounded around the shack, hesitated at the edge of the mangrove-shrouded lake, then splashed on.

Someone came in the door of the shack. Gil turned, and Nora was standing there.

"Will—will he get away?" she stammered, not knowing what else to say. She ran to him and hid her face against his chest. "I'm scared, Gil. I don't want anything to happen to him. He's—your friend."

Gil held her close. She didn't want anything to happen to Vince—because Vince was his friend. His arms tightened.

"He'll get away," he said. "Then I'll bring him back, and he'll stand trial. He hit Lloyd only in self-defense. He'll be all right. Vince is the kind of guy who's always all right. . . ."

The cries of Hardee and his deputies grew fainter, and Gil saw the last jeweled splashes as they climbed the opposite shore of the lake and stopped before the jungly grove of mangrove and sea grape. Vince's great roaring laugh floated back. . . .

THE END

Mr. Mouthpiece

(Continued from page 93)

"Tell the cops about the money Atwood owed you and how he paid off after each phony robbery that he and Kuntzman pulled. They already smell a rat. It was too pat—Kuntzman, the cop on the beat, was the only verification Atwood had each time. Atwood and Kuntzman decided they would make it look good the third time and provide a fall guy. Atwood waited in the doorway after closing time until a likely prospect came along. John Smith, on the bum, was just right. Atwood lured him in, Just as John Smith told the police he did, offering a buck for a delivery job. Then Kuntzman came out of hiding, a gun in hand, and put on an act, accusing John Smith of a stick-up.

"There was just one thing that neither Kuntzman nor Atwood counted on. Their fall guy was heeled. He did what any normal human being would do—he defended himself. When he pulled out his automatic, Kuntzman was so stunned he couldn't shoot first, even though he had the drop on the guy.

"The guy dropped Kuntzman and then ran right into a prowl car that neither Atwood nor Kuntzman knew anything about. It's a hundred-to-one shot that their story was to include a second stick-up man that got away with the cash. Kuntzman was to get a medal for dropping the fall guy, who could never deny the story."

Bodine turned to the store manager. "Any corrections?"

Atwood pointed a finger at Varga and screamed, "It was all his idea! He made me go through with it and planned the whole thing just to get the money I'd lost on his crooked tables!"

Varga turned white. Little beads of perspiration formed about his lips. He called Atwood a name. It was quite a name. Mike Umanski moved in on Atwood before he could dodge away. Bodine didn't feel so bad about having screamed when Umanski

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Julius Long

had twisted his arm. His scream was nothing compared to the store manager's.

It was Atwood's right arm that Umanski twisted, but it was in good enough shape for Atwood to write a complete confession completely clearing Varga, by the time the first cruiser crew arrived at the super-market.

Bodine had removed the tape from Joan Wolf's mouth by then.

"I'm sorry," he told her. "I knew Atwood would blow his top when you walked in here, but I thought he'd only run to Varga's place, where I could scare Varga into squealing about that gambling debt. It never dawned on me that he'd be dumb enough to get you into his office and then hold you."

"He hit me when I wasn't looking," Joan Wolf said. She rubbed an invisible knob in her blonde hair. "I don't know why he thought I had to be taped up. I positively didn't know anything."

Bodine laughed. "Neither did I! It's just that when a man has a guilty conscience, he can't believe that people aren't wise to him!"

The girl's eyes widened. "But you—you *did* know something! Otherwise you'd never have taken the case."

It was midnight when Pat O'Neill found Barry Bodine in a private room of the Varga Club. He was sitting hunched in a deep chair, staring broodingly into a high-ball glass.

"He's all yours," said Lou Varga. "I can't do a thing with him."

He closed the door behind him. Pat crossed to the lawyer and shook him mercilessly. Bodine looked up with a start, recognized Pat and smiled weakly from his chair.

"What's the matter with you?" she demanded. "You ran out on that poor blonde girl before she could even thank you for saving her brother's life! And Charles Wolf, alias John Smith, wants to thank you,

Mr. Mouthpiece

too. Why, you've never even seen your client once!"

"I hope I never will. Believe me, Pat, his case was my first loser."

"Loser? Why, he's out of jail and a free man!"

"But I only took the case because I was perfectly sure he'd go to the electric chair, Pat!"

She shook her head impatiently. "That doesn't make any sense."

Bodine sighed. "All right, then. It was because of the dreams I've been having for years—awful dreams—nightmares! I've never told anybody about them—except a psychiatrist back east. Always when I've had a murder case I've dreamed that I'd lost it and that I was having to watch my client burn in the electric chair! I've gone through a thousand hells with every trial; it's made me a nervous wreck. The psychiatrist told me I'd never be cured till it actually happened, till a client of mine actually burned in the electric chair! So I took the John Smith case.

"It looked like a sure thing. I couldn't lose. John Smith was guilty as hell. A cop-killer who didn't have a chance. But nobody would have it that way. Everybody figured I knew something. Everybody thought I'd pull a rabbit out of my hat as usual. And look what happened!"

Pat laughed. "Sure," said Pat. "You pulled a rabbit out of your hat—as usual. Now me, I'm just a secretary and an ex-chorus girl. I'm no skull doctor. But I think you're a cured man. You won't have any more bad dreams about your clients frying from now on. Don't you see you've cured yourself, taking a case you couldn't win and still keeping the guy out of the chair in spite of yourself? Don't you realize you're cured?"

Bodine eyed her a moment, then suddenly smiled.

"If you say so, Doc."

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Ready for the Rackets

(Continued from page 10)

might make the same mistake. I didn't have to, however, because, as I read the police bulletin in the evening newspaper, I found that the same sale had been made to quite a number of people.

Mrs. Merle Fulton
El Paso, Texas

Ego-Deflater

Dear Sir:

Soon after I was promoted to my present executive position with a furniture manufacturing concern, I received a letter from a man who described himself as editor of an executive's magazine, published in Charlotte, N. C.

He informed me that his magazine was planning an issue to be devoted to rising young executives of the Carolinas.

Along with the letter came proof sheets of an article the magazine had prepared. Actually it was a lengthy biographical sketch of myself. After reading it, I thought the magazine deserved a pat on the back for finding out how clever I was. So I corrected the proof sheets and sent them back to the magazine, feeling self-important.

A few days later I had a long-distance phone call from the editor of the executive's magazine. He smoothly congratulated me upon my recent promotion. In an offhand manner he mentioned that the magazine was then going to press. He figured I would want some copies to distribute among my friends and customers and thought I should be informed the magazine was never sold on newsstands. It was available only through subscription. He suggested casually that I order a minimum of 200 copies at 50 cents each.

I gloated when I thought of certain people who would turn green with envy when they read the article describing me as "one of the rising young executives of the Carolinas." But I decided to bring modesty to bear and only ordered 100 copies of the magazine.

When the magazines arrived, I felt for the first time in my life the sickening realization of having been taken for a sucker. The magazine turned out to be a cheap, shoddy pamphlet containing, besides my own, several other sketches of men I had never heard of before.

I wished desperately that I had my hands around the throat of that "editor" of the "executive's magazine," but I had to content myself with bundling up the magazines and stowing them as far back as possible in the trunk of my car.

On my next fishing trip to the Santee River, I took them out of the trunk and dropped them into a burlap bag. I added two bricks just to be sure. Then I took the bag out to midstream and dropped it overboard.

R. N. R.
Sumter, S. C.

This winds up the scoop on the latest swindles for this time, but we'll be back again with lots more in the next issue.

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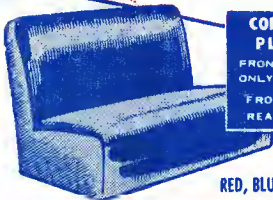
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